Cook's Country

DECEMBER/JANUARY 2017

Double-Crust Chicken Pot Pie

No more soggy bottom: Our dough bakes up crisp and golden brown every time.

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THE RESPONSES AROUND the test kitchen to the announcement that we'd be developing a recipe for eggnog fell into two distinct camps: pro and con. Folks either loved eggnog or hated it. There was no in between.

Test cook Morgan Bolling had her work cut out for her—not just to create a perfect recipe for eggnog but to win over the naysayers. (Spoiler alert: She did. See the recipe on page 17.)

I'll admit my bias: I was in the pro camp. For most of my life I was . . . well, I was just fine with eggnog. I liked it, but I didn't crave it. But then I watched the classic screwball comedy *The Awful Truth*. In one early scene, Cary Grant stands behind a gargantuan punch bowl, spooning out servings of eggnog to a group of friends while awaiting the return of Irene Dunne and her apparent paramour. He did it with so much élan (he was Cary Grant, after all) that I, previously relatively ambivalent about eggnog, fell head over heels in love with it.

Funny how the context surrounding a thing can influence how you feel about the thing itself. We think about that a lot here at *Cook's Country*. Our core mission is to produce great recipes and great ideas for food that you'll like. But through travel, history, and culture, we also strive to find stories that will make you fall in love.

TUCKER SHAW

Executive Editor

Associate editor Morgan Bolling (top) was not a fan of eggnog until she developed a recipe for it. The process involved tasting several existing recipes (above) before setting goals for a fresh, rich eggnog. For inspiration, we watched *The Awful Truth*, the 1930s movie in which Cary Grant (left) commandeered the punch bowl to ladle out nog for his guests.

Photo: The Awful Truth © 1937, 1965 CPII; kitchen photography: Kevin White

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On the cover: Double-Crust Chicken Pot Pie Keller + Keller, Catrine Kelly
Illustration: Greg Stevenson

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AMERICA'S TEST KITCHEN
RECIPES THAT WORK™

America's Test Kitchen is a real 2,500-square-foot kitchen located just outside Boston. It is the home of more than 60 test cooks, editors, and cookware specialists. Our mission is to test recipes until we understand exactly how and why they work and eventually arrive at the very best version. We also test kitchen equipment and supermarket ingredients in search of products that offer the best value and performance. You can watch us work by tuning in to *America's Test Kitchen* (AmericasTestKitchen.com) and *Cooks Country from America's Test Kitchen* (CooksCountry.com) on public television and listen to us on our weekly radio program on PRX. You can also follow us on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and Instagram.

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Ask Cook's Country

BY MORGAN BOLLING

What's in a Name?

What's the difference between broccoli rabe, broccolini, and broccoli?
Jerry Schutz, Hopewell, Va.

Most Americans are familiar with broccoli, but not the other two. Broccoli, broccolini, and broccoli rabe are all cruciferous vegetables, but broccoli rabe is more closely related to turnips, another member of the *Brassicaceae* family. Broccolini is a cross between broccoli and Chinese broccoli, and it looks like broccoli stretched into a long, skinny form.

Broccoli rabe has a bitter bite that can be polarizing: People who love dark leafy greens are typically fans, while others can be turned off by its pungent flavor. In a recent tasting, our tasters lauded its "sharp" and "minerally" flavor and spicy finish. Broccolini is a bit sweeter than broccoli, with a flavor some tasters likened to a cross between spinach and asparagus.

THE BOTTOM LINE: Broccoli rabe is bitter and a bit spicy; broccolini is sweeter.

BROCCOLI
Supermarket staple

BROCCOLINI
Sweet, vegetal flavor

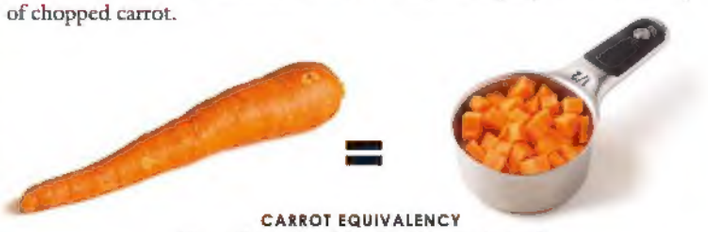
BROCCOLI RABE
Pleasantly pungent bite

Sizing up Carrots

Can you advise me on the weight or volume equivalency when you call for a single carrot in recipes?
Ellen Darrah-Schenk, Elkhart, Ind.

In the test kitchen, we specify vegetable size only if it's crucial to the success of the recipe. But we are as precise as possible in our recipe testing and development, so we do have an answer for you. Our default carrot size is "medium." What does that mean? We use the guideline that six medium carrots equal 1 pound, so one medium carrot weighs 2⅔ ounces. When peeled and chopped into ½-inch pieces, one medium carrot should yield a scant ½ cup.

THE BOTTOM LINE: One medium carrot should yield slightly less than ½ cup of chopped carrot.



CARROT EQUIVALENCY
One medium carrot yields about ½ cup chopped.

Sugar Swap?

I love the test kitchen's Brown Sugar Cookies and make the recipe several times a year. I recently made it using organic dark brown sugar, and the cookies came out a bit tough. What gives?
Meghan Sheehan, South Tuscon, Ariz.

Intrigued by your results, we used regular brown sugar and organic brown sugar (either light or dark, per each recipe) to make batches of three of our recipes: Brown Sugar Cookies, Bourbon–Brown Sugar Whipped Cream, and Ultranutty Pecan Bars.

In the Bourbon–Brown Sugar Whipped Cream (which calls for light brown sugar), tasters barely noticed a difference. But in both the Brown Sugar Cookies (made with dark brown sugar) and the Ultranutty Pecan Bars (made with light brown sugar), the difference was clear: The cookies made with organic brown sugar were crispier and tougher. The pecan bars, which should be pleasantly chewy, were brittle and toffee-like when made with the organic sugar. And both samples made with the organic sugar felt grittier.

Why? Because most organic brown sugars are minimally processed, their crystals tend to be larger than those of regular brown sugar. We think of sugar as a dry ingredient, but it melts in the heat of the oven and thus provides baked goods with moisture. Larger crystals don't dissolve as readily when heated, which means that they are more likely to result in drier, grittier, crunchier treats.

THE BOTTOM LINE: Most organic brown sugars have larger crystals than standard brown sugar; these large crystals don't dissolve as readily in baked goods. Because of this, we do not recommend organic brown sugar for baking unless a recipe specifically calls for it.

Refreezing Pie Dough

I love the convenience of store-bought pie dough. The product I buy comes with two crusts—one for the bottom and one for the top of the pie. When I don't use both crusts in a pack, is it okay to refreeze the one that's already been thawed?
Alex Donovan, Mount Holly, N.J.

To find out if we could refreeze the extra roll of dough that often comes in packages of store-bought pie dough, we bought three varieties of prepared pie dough, including our taste-test winner, Wholly Wholesome 9" Certified Organic Traditional Bake at Home Rolled Pie Dough.

We tested frozen pie doughs that had been thawed for 24 hours in the refrigerator, refrozen, and thawed again (all in their original packages) and compared them with freshly thawed doughs. We sampled them baked without a filling, in our Lemon Chess Pie, and in our French Coconut Pie. While a few tasters noticed that the twice-thawed shells were slightly tougher than the fresh shells, most could not distinguish between the samples.

THE BOTTOM LINE: Go ahead and refreeze that extra roll of pie dough, preferably in its original packaging. If you opened the dough and took it out of its packaging, wrap it tightly in plastic before refreezing.

Mixed Bag

I recently bought one of those mesh bags of purple, yellow, and red baby potatoes. But when I roasted them all together, I found that the purple ones took longer to cook than the other two. Is there a reason?
Frank Gordon, Keokuk, Iowa

Raina Pape-Boone, a produce expert from Boston-area specialty grocer Sid Wainer and Sons, explained to us that most likely the three potatoes in your mesh bag are Purple, Yukon Gold, and Red Bliss potatoes.

Purple potatoes are a high-starch, low-moisture variety, similar to russets; when cooked, they become dry and fluffy. Red Bliss are low-starch potatoes that cook up firm, dense, and waxy. Yukon Golds are the middle ground, with a medium starch content.

When we bought a few bags of mixed-color potatoes and roasted them in a 450-degree oven, our results mirrored yours—the purple spuds took longer to cook. After a few more tests, we found that we could mitigate the problem by covering the pan with foil for the first 20 minutes of roasting. Purple potatoes contain less moisture than Red Bliss and Yukon Gold potatoes, meaning there's less moisture available to gelatinize the starch as the Purple potatoes cook and it takes them longer to cook. The foil traps steam and heat, which helps gelatinize the starch so the potatoes cook faster.

THE BOTTOM LINE: Small potatoes of different colors vary in starch and moisture contents, so they cook at dissimilar rates. If you want to roast them together, make sure to cover the roasting pan with foil. The foil traps steam and heat that speeds the cooking of the starchier potatoes and help equalize the cooking times.

A COLORFUL CONUNDRUM
Spuds of different hues cook at different rates.

To ask us a cooking question, visit **CooksCountry.com/ask**. Or write to Ask *Cook's Country*, P.O. Box 470739, Brookline, MA 02447. Just try to stump us!

Kitchen Shortcuts

COMPILED BY DIANE UNGER

NEAT IDEA

Organize It!

Beth Haber, Colorado Springs, Colo.

Frosting and decorating holiday cookies can turn into a huge mess—especially if my kids are involved. To keep things neat and orderly, I use a 12-cup muffin tin to hold the sprinkles, glitter, and candy. This way all the decorations are contained in one place.

SMART TIP

Grate Idea for Brown Sugar

Mike Harrison, Palmyra, Va.

I've found myself with rock-hard brown sugar on many occasions; the kind that's too hard to salvage with any of the well-known tricks. Unwilling to pitch it in the trash, I've found that I can grate the sugar using a rasp-style grater and use the dry, granular sugar for sprinkling on oatmeal, berries, or buttered toast. Waste not, want not.

CLEVER TIP

Leave No Juice Behind

Carolyn Whitney, Fort Worth, Texas

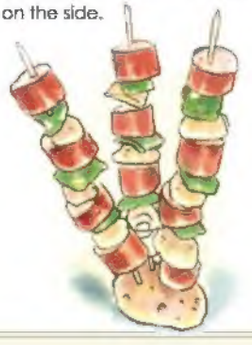
Hinged handheld citrus juicers are great for squeezing small amounts of juice. But very often I find lots of juice left after squeezing. To extract the most juice with the least effort, I cut the ends off the lemon, halve it through the equator, and put the interior side facing down in the hopper. Then I squeeze, flip the fruit, and squeeze again. Cutting the ends off makes a world of difference.

SMART PREP

Skewering Line

Donald Barrows, Vernon, Conn.

I've come up with a trick to assemble kebabs quickly and with military precision. I cut everything into chunks, and then I slice a large potato in half lengthwise and set the halves cut side down on my cutting board. I insert three or four wooden skewers into each potato half and slide on the meat and vegetables in assembly-line fashion. When I'm done with the potatoes, I slice them up and either add them to the last skewers or grill them on the side.



NEAT TRICK

Wrap It Up

Mary Prestidge, Tow Harbors, Minn.

I'm kind of a neatnik in the kitchen, especially when it comes to my kitchen appliances. I found an easy trick to keep straggling cords from my mixer or food processor in place. I use adhesive plastic hooks (the kind you might use for towels on your bathroom door) affixed to the back of the machines to wrap up cords and keep them out of the way.

GREEN CLEAN

Citrus Scent

Bob Ellis, Salem, Mass.

My wife and I aren't big fans of chemical-laden store-bought household cleaning products, so we make our own from vinegar and citrus peel. We just fill a spray bottle about ⅔ full with distilled white vinegar and add the peels of two lemons or oranges to the bottle. This cleaning solution works great on the stove, counters, etc., and the citrus helps cover the vinegar smell.

DOUBLE DUTY

Neater Mincing

Rosemary Mansfield, Amherst, Mass.

I add minced anchovy to a lot of different dishes: dressings, pizza, stews, and even tomato sauce. But as much as I appreciate the deep flavor, I hate getting the anchovy smell on my hands or my cutting board. I've discovered that I can easily mince anchovies in my garlic press. I just fill the hopper with anchovy filets, press, and scrape the minced anchovies off with the back of a knife. No mess or lingering odor.

Submit a tip online at **CooksCountry.com/kitchenshortcuts** or send a letter to Kitchen Shortcuts, *Cook's Country*, P.O. Box 470739, Brookline, MA 02447. Include your name, address, and phone number. If we publish your tip, you will receive a free one-year subscription to *Cook's Country*. Letters may be edited for clarity and length.

Illustration: Ross MacDonald

Double-Crust Chicken Pot Pie

Patience is more than just a virtue. It's also the key to a perfect pot pie.

BY KATIE LEAIRD

IT'S HARD TO imagine anything more comforting than a traditional pot pie: savory chicken and vegetables suspended in a velvety cream gravy and topped with a flaky pie crust. That is, unless you imagine a perfect slice of this rich, savory pie, standing tall on a plate, with a second buttery crust underneath.

I started with a favorite test kitchen pie dough, which I bolstered with a beaten egg for richness (and to make it easier to work with), as well as a healthy dose of sour cream to lend it a slightly tangy flavor. The dough came together easily in the food processor and, after a quick knead to bring it all together and an hour-long chill in the fridge, it rolled out easily and neatly on my very lightly floured counter. I was ready to tackle the filling.

I wanted the pie's filling to be savory and satisfying but also just as simple to make as the crust. I sautéed vegetables (onion, carrots, and celery) with butter in a large saucepan, thickened this mixture with a generous sprinkling of flour, and whisked in some chicken broth and half-and-half. I cut a potato into tiny cubes and added them to the sauce, where they cooked through in just 8 minutes. After stirring in fresh thyme for an herbal boost and some salt and pepper for thorough seasoning, I had a flavorful base ready for cooked chicken.

In the past, we've used many methods for cooking chicken before adding it to pie filling, including poaching, sautéing, and baking. But all of these required additional pots and pans and quite a bit of time—and since this pie is already a project, I wanted an easier route. So I grabbed a grocery store rotisserie chicken, shredded the already-cooked meat—both light and dark—and stirred it into my filling. Not only was this a timesaver (and a dirty dish saver), but my filling turned out flavorful and moist.

I spooned the filling into the bottom crust and topped it with the rolled-out top crust before carefully crimping the edges, cutting four slits in the top for ventilation, and baking the pie for about 20 minutes at 450 degrees and 15 minutes longer at 375, until the crust was a gorgeous golden brown.

By now, the only trouble I was having was with serving. Whenever I sliced into the pie and lifted out a piece, the piping-hot filling just flowed out. I needed to thicken things up.

Brushing the top crust with beaten egg ensures a shiny, lacquered finish. Vent holes slit into the top help keep the crust crisp and the filling cohesive.

I was hesitant to increase the amount of flour for fear of turning the silky sauce into glue. I was equally wary of cornstarch. While I considered my options for a spell, the answer revealed itself: Simply letting the fully baked pie rest for 45 minutes gave it time to tighten up and become satisfyingly sliceable. And my crust didn't sog out at all. (Don't worry, it was still warm enough to eat.)

The hardest part of this recipe is waiting for the filling to firm up before slicing and serving the pie. I have no advice to offer other than "Good luck with that."

STEP BY STEP **Double-Crust Chicken Pot Pie**

Sour cream and egg bolster the dough so it's easy to roll out and stays crisp on the bottom.

1. Prepare dough in food processor, knead briefly on counter, divide into 2 disks, and refrigerate for 1 hour.
2. Let chilled dough sit at room temperature for 10 minutes, then roll out 1 disk on lightly floured counter.
3. Loosely roll dough around pin, unroll onto pie plate, and gently press in. Roll out second disk and refrigerate.
4. Transfer chicken mixture to dough-lined pie plate.
5. Unroll top crust onto filling, trim and pinch edges, and tuck overhang. Crimp edge, cut slits in top, and brush with egg.

DOUBLE-CRUST CHICKEN POT PIE

Serves 6 to 8

The pie may seem loose when it comes out of the oven; it will set up as it cools. You can substitute 3 cups of turkey meat for the chicken, if desired.

CRUST

- ½ cup sour cream, chilled
- 1 large egg, lightly beaten
- 2½ cups (12½ ounces) all-purpose flour
- 1½ teaspoons salt
- 12 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into ½-inch pieces and chilled

FILLING

- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 1 onion, chopped fine
- 2 carrots, peeled and cut into ¼-inch pieces (⅔ cup)
- 2 celery ribs, cut into ¼-inch pieces (½ cup)
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon pepper
- 6 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 2¼ cups chicken broth
- ½ cup half-and-half
- 1 small russet potato (6 ounces), peeled and cut into ¼-inch pieces (1 cup)
- 1 teaspoon minced fresh thyme
- 1 (2½-pound) rotisserie chicken, skin and bones discarded, meat shredded into bite-size pieces (3 cups)
- ¾ cup frozen peas

- 1 large egg, lightly beaten

1. FOR THE CRUST: Combine sour cream and egg in bowl. Process flour and salt in food processor until combined, about 3 seconds. Add butter and pulse until only pea-size pieces remain, about 10 pulses. Add half of sour cream mixture and pulse until combined, 5 pulses. Add remaining sour cream mixture and pulse until dough begins to form, about 10 pulses.

2. Transfer mixture to lightly floured counter and knead briefly until dough comes together. Divide dough in half and form each half into 4-inch disk. Wrap disks tightly in plastic wrap and refrigerate for 1 hour. (Wrapped dough can be refrigerated for up to 2 days or frozen for up to 2 months. If frozen, let dough thaw completely on counter before rolling.)

3. Let chilled dough sit on counter to soften slightly, about 10 minutes, before rolling. Roll 1 disk of dough into 12-inch circle on lightly floured counter. Loosely roll dough around rolling pin and gently unroll it onto 9-inch pie plate, letting excess dough hang over edge. Ease dough into plate by gently lifting edge of dough with your hand while pressing into plate bottom with your other hand.

4. Roll other disk of dough into 12-inch circle on lightly floured counter, then transfer to parchment paper–lined baking sheet; cover with plastic. Refrigerate both doughs for 30 minutes.

5. FOR THE FILLING: Meanwhile, adjust oven rack to lowest position and heat oven to 450 degrees. Melt butter in large saucepan over medium heat. Add onion, carrots, celery, salt, and pepper and cook until vegetables begin to soften, about 6 minutes. Add flour and cook, stirring constantly, until golden, 1 to 2 minutes. Slowly stir in broth and half-and-half and bring to boil over medium-high heat.

6. Stir in potato and thyme. Reduce heat to medium and simmer until sauce is thickened and potato is tender, about 8 minutes. Off heat, stir in chicken and peas.

7. Transfer filling to dough-lined pie plate. Loosely roll remaining dough round around rolling pin and gently unroll it onto filling. Trim overhang to ½ inch beyond lip of plate. Pinch edges of top and bottom crusts firmly together. Tuck overhang under itself; folded edge should be flush with edge of plate. Crimp dough evenly around edge of plate using your fingers. Cut four 2-inch slits in top of dough.

8. Brush top of pie with egg. Place pie on rimmed baking sheet. Bake until top is light golden brown, 18 to 20 minutes. Reduce oven temperature to 375 degrees, rotate sheet, and continue to bake until crust is deep golden brown, 12 to 15 minutes longer. Let pie cool on wire rack for at least 45 minutes. Serve.

TO MAKE AHEAD

At end of step 6, transfer filling to bowl and refrigerate until fully chilled, about 1½ hours. Continue with step 7, then wrap pie tightly in plastic wrap and then aluminum foil. Freeze for up to 1 month. When ready to bake, unwrap frozen pie, cover with foil, and place on rimmed baking sheet (do not thaw). Place sheet on middle rack of cold oven and set oven to 375 degrees. Bake for 1¼ hours. Uncover pie and brush with egg. Rotate sheet and continue to bake until crust is golden brown and filling is beginning to bubble up through slits and registers at least 150 degrees, 55 minutes to 1¼ hours longer. Let cool for 45 minutes before serving.

Let It Cool Before Slicing It

Don't be tempted to eat the pot pie straight out of the oven. We tried it, and the piping-hot filling ran all over our plates. Letting the pie cool on a wire rack for at least 45 minutes gives the filling time to firm up just enough to hold together during slicing. (Don't worry, it will still be plenty hot.)

The American Table
Chicken Run

Until the 1920s, chickens were common enough, though they were raised primarily for eggs and not for meat. But in 1923, Delaware farmer Celia Steele was mistakenly sent 500 chicks instead of the 50 she'd ordered, and rather than send them back, she decided to raise them in her barn. Within weeks, she had a squawking surplus of "broilers," which she sold at a tidy profit, unknowingly kicking off a factory-farming boom. Enterprising entrepreneurs saw that chicken meat was (and still is) vastly less expensive to raise than beef or pork, and customers loved it.

By 1932, chicken was ubiquitous enough that President Herbert Hoover was reported to have promised "a chicken in every pot and a car in every garage" in an earlier campaign advertisement. He lost his reelection bid, but chicken was well on its way to being the most widely consumed meat in the country.

Illustration: Lauren Pettapiece; Photo: Farm Security Administration (Indiana, 1938)

Transylvanian Goulash

No vampires were consulted in the making of this Pittsburgh favorite, but we did get some tips from a goulash master. BY CHRISTIE MORRISON

AMONG THE MOST popular dishes served at Alexander Bodnar's tiny restaurant in the Hazelwood neighborhood of Pittsburgh (see "On The Road") is his signature Transylvanian goulash. Like its Hungarian counterpart, Transylvanian goulash (named for the picturesque area in central Romania, Hungary's next door neighbor) is a flavorful stew made of browned meat, aromatic vegetables, and a heavy dose of paprika. But while most Hungarian goulash is made with beef, Bodnar's version features pork and tangy sauerkraut.

To re-create the dish, I started with a boneless pork butt roast that I cut into chunks. I knew that this cut has good marbling and was therefore well suited to a prolonged braise that would result in tender meat and deep flavor. Browning the pork in batches built up a flavorful fond in the bottom of the pot. I consulted Bodnar on the vegetables he uses to add complexity: onion, celery, green bell pepper, and a single tomato. I cooked these in the rendered pork fat for about 8 minutes to soften them before adding spices.

The dish's trademark red color and subtle earthy, slightly fruity flavor come from 3 tablespoons of sweet Hungarian paprika (not to be confused with sweet smoked paprika—a different beast entirely). I loved the addition of caraway seeds, another staple in Eastern European cooking; though sharp and assertive in rye and pumpernickel breads, the seeds' flavor mellows over the long cooking time into a subtle, almost citrusy presence.

While we often add chicken stock in the test kitchen to boost savory depth in all sorts of stews, Bodnar insisted that water would better allow the complex flavors of the different ingredients to shine. Tasters agreed: The stew was intensely flavored and deeply savory, especially after the addition of sauerkraut two-thirds of the way through cooking. But the sauerkraut was too sour to all but one of my tasters—a professed sauerkraut lover. At Bodnar's suggestion, I rinsed the sauerkraut to remove some of the excess brine and soften the flavor before adding it to the stew.

Once the pork was fully cooked and the stew was ready to serve, I took another cue from Bodnar and served it with a dollop of tangy sour cream and a sprinkling of fresh minced dill (a family tradition inspired by its abundance in his mother's garden).

The textures and flavors were in sync: The pork was perfectly tender but still held its shape, its richness balanced by the sturdy backbone of paprika and the faintly sharp sauerkraut. I had a satisfying, entirely comforting stew, full of flavors from Pittsburgh—and Transylvania, too.

Creamy, tangy sour cream adds character to this dish; a final toss of minced dill freshens it up.

INGREDIENT SPOTLIGHT **Paprika**

Some think of paprika as merely a coloring agent for soups and stews or a garnish for deviled eggs. With its deep reddish hue and rich, earthy flavor, paprika is an essential element of goulash. It's made by grinding dried sweet red chile peppers, a different variety than is used to make hot or smoked paprika.

TEST KITCHEN FAVORITE

Our winning sweet paprika—The Spice House Hungarian Sweet Paprika—bested the competition with its "earthy," "fruity" flavors.

TRANSYLVANIAN GOULASH

Serves 6 to 8

Pork butt roast is often labeled Boston butt in the supermarket. Since paprika is vital to the success of this recipe, it is best to use a fresh bottle. Do not substitute hot or smoked Spanish paprika for the sweet paprika called for here. Eden Organic jarred sauerkraut is the test kitchen's favorite sauerkraut. Rinsing the sauerkraut reduces its sharp flavor and bite; if you prefer sharper sauerkraut flavor, omit this step. Serve with white rice, if desired.

- **1 (3½-pound) boneless pork butt roast, trimmed and cut into 1½-inch pieces**
- **Salt and pepper**
- **1 tablespoon vegetable oil**
- **1 onion, chopped fine**
- **1 green bell pepper, stemmed, seeded, and chopped fine**
- **2 celery ribs, chopped fine**
- **1 plum tomato, chopped**
- **3 tablespoons sweet paprika**
- **1 tablespoon caraway seeds**
- **2 garlic cloves, minced**
- **3 cups water**
- **2 cups sauerkraut, rinsed and drained**
- **Sour cream**
- **Minced fresh dill**

1. Adjust oven rack to lower-middle position and heat oven to 325 degrees. Pat pork dry with paper towels and sprinkle with 1 teaspoon salt and ½ teaspoon pepper.

2. Heat oil in Dutch oven over medium-high heat until just smoking. Add half of pork and cook, stirring occasionally, until brown on all sides, about 8 minutes; transfer to bowl. (Reduce heat if bottom of pot begins to scorch.) Repeat with remaining pork.

3. Reduce heat to medium. Add onion, bell pepper, celery, tomato, and ½ teaspoon salt to now-empty pot and cook until vegetables are softened and liquid has evaporated, 8 to 10 minutes, scraping up any browned bits.

4. Add paprika, caraway seeds, and garlic and cook until fragrant, about 1 minute. Stir in water and pork and any accumulated juices and bring to simmer, scraping up any browned bits. Cover, transfer to oven, and cook for 1 hour. Stir in sauerkraut, cover, return pot to oven, and continue to cook until pork is fully tender, about 30 minutes longer.

5. Using wide spoon, skim off any surface fat. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve, garnished with sour cream and dill.

Go to **CooksCountry.com/pittsburgh** to learn more about the food we ate in Pittsburgh and to see pictures of our trip.

Illustration: Ross MacDonald; Photos: Steve Klise

ON THE ROAD

Alexander Bodnar, top, welcomes regulars and newcomers alike to his literal hole in the wall at Józsa Corner. Elbow to elbow, patrons use plastic cutlery and paper plates to devour the traditional Eastern European fare. The restaurant is located in Pittsburgh's Hazelwood neighborhood.

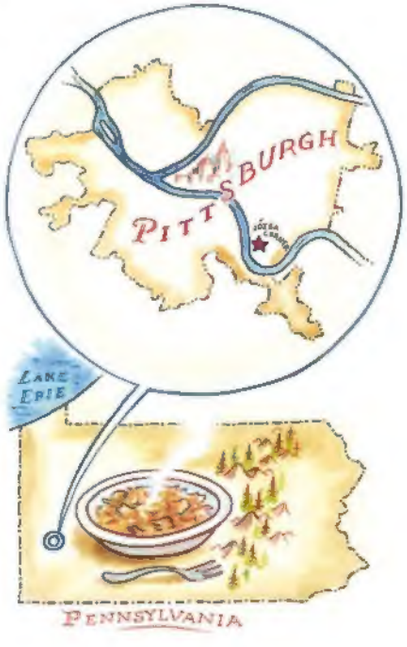
A Big, Strong Pittsburgh Belly

There's something very satisfying about finding a diamond in the rough. Hazelwood, a neighborhood a few minutes from downtown Pittsburgh, can accurately be described as "the rough"—a fact my cabbie was sure to reinforce—and the unassuming Hungarian restaurant Józsa Corner as "the diamond." It occupies a distressed whitewashed building along the railroad tracks where the owner, Alexander Józsa Bodnar, a veteran of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, rules the kitchen.

One Friday a month, Bodnar hosts "Hungarian Night." You step through the main entrance directly into the kitchen, where Bodnar is feverishly preparing the coming meal. He welcomes everyone warmly. You then pass from the kitchen to the dining room through a sledgehammered opening in a weathered brick wall, which looks like the Hulk himself busted through one night in search of *paprikash*. Guests cozy up, elbow to elbow, at long tables in a converted living room where an ancient red velvet sofa and an old piano rest quietly unused.

Bodnar enters the dining room through the hole in the wall with a plate of yeasted fry bread called *lángos* and a bowl of mushroom paprikash to be spooned over the top, chanting "Egyetek, vegyetek, hadd n jön a begyetek," a saying that promotes the virtues of eating for a "big, strong belly." What follows is a simple meal with a personality as big as our host: peasant soup (so called for the many bones it contains), *haluska*, chicken paprikash, and goulash.

Although I'm dining with strangers, the mood transforms into one of a familiar dinner with close friends. Hours later, I leave, patting my own full, strong belly. –BRYAN ROOF



Grapefruit-Avocado Salad

A midwinter salad using in-season ingredients? Challenge accepted.

BY KATIE LEAIRD

Just ¼ cup of blanched hazelnuts, toasted in a skillet and chopped, adds crunch.

PALE GREEN AVOCADO and vibrant pink grapefruit, both in season during winter's bleakest months, make a handsome couple. At the fruits' best, the buttery and nutty notes of the soft avocado play well with the grapefruit's invigorating tang. But if assembled carelessly, the combination can be bitter and wet. I wanted a salad that showcased the natural beauty and best flavors of each fruit.

Grapefruit peel is intensely bitter, as is the pith—the soft white layer between the fruit and its skin. I tried simply cutting away these two offending layers and then slicing the exposed fruit into rounds. This method was quick and easy, but the result still retained too much membrane and was tricky to eat. The better method was to cut each segment away from its membranes, leaving pure, sweet bites of grapefruit.

Tossing cut-up avocado with the other salad ingredients made for a muddy result, so I had to assemble this salad less roughly. I dispensed with the idea of arranging the components on a platter in an alternating pattern of green and pink—too fancy and precious. Instead, I arranged a single layer of grapefruit segments over the avocado slices. Attractive and simple.

I considered incorporating salad greens, but these obscured the colors of the avocado and grapefruit. Instead, I went for herbs: Whole cilantro leaves and torn mint leaves packed plenty of flavor without becoming overwhelming, and they looked pretty, too. Toasted hazelnuts added a little crunch.

I needed a carefully crafted dressing with a strong olive oil presence and a little sugar to enhance the grapefruit's sweetness and temper its tang. I used a shallot for its subtle onion flavor and some Dijon for both its zip and its emulsifying properties. For brightness, I added juice left over from segmenting the grapefruits, along with a teaspoon of white wine vinegar.

GRAPEFRUIT-AVOCADO SALAD

Serves 4 to 6

A ripe avocado will yield slightly to a gentle squeeze when held in the palm of your hand.

- **3 red grapefruits**
- **2 ripe avocados, halved, pitted, and sliced ¼ inch thick**
- **¼ cup fresh mint leaves, torn**
- **¼ cup fresh cilantro leaves**
- **¼ cup blanched hazelnuts, toasted and chopped coarse**
- **3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil**
- **1 tablespoon minced shallot**
- **1 teaspoon white wine vinegar**
- **1 teaspoon Dijon mustard**
- **1 teaspoon sugar**
- **½ teaspoon salt**

1. Cut away peel and pith from grapefruits. Holding fruit over bowl, use paring knife to slice between membranes to release segments. Reserve 2 tablespoons grapefruit juice.

2. Arrange avocado in single layer on large platter. Distribute grapefruit evenly over top. Sprinkle mint, cilantro, and hazelnuts over top.

3. Whisk oil, shallot, vinegar, mustard, sugar, salt, and reserved grapefruit juice together in bowl. Drizzle dressing over salad. Serve immediately.

TEST KITCHEN TIPS **Prepping the Main Ingredients for the Salad**

Grapefruit: Peel and Segment
Using a paring knife, trim away the peel and pith. Cut toward the center between the pulp and the membrane to remove each segment.

Avocado: Remove Pit and Scoop
Strike the pit sharply with a chef's knife. Twist the blade to remove the pit and use a dish towel to pull the pit off the blade. Insert a spoon between the skin and the flesh to separate the two.

Hazelnuts: Toast and Chop
Place the nuts in a dry skillet set over medium heat and stir frequently until they're fragrant and have darkened slightly, 3 to 5 minutes. To corral the nuts during chopping, place a cutting board inside a rimmed baking sheet.

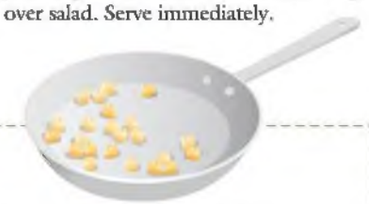


Illustration: Lauren Pettapiece

Braised Leeks

A simple technique brings out the best in this often-neglected vegetable.

BY SARAH GABR EL WITH MORGAN BO.LING

TOO OFTEN, FRESH and flavorful leeks end up as supporting players in soups—or worse, they never leave the grocery store produce aisle. I wanted to treat this underrated vegetable a little more carefully, braising it slowly to bring out its mild flavors in a warm dish suitable for still brisk springtime nights

I gathered a variety of existing recipes, and after much slicing, washing, browning, braising, whisking, and dressing, I called my tasters. We agreed on a few things: One, cutting the leeks lengthwise, leaving the root ends intact, made for the best presentation. Two, browning the leeks and then braising them in broth yielded the deepest flavor. And three, it had to be easy

Back in the kitchen, I halved and washed 3 pounds of leeks, seasoned them with salt and pepper, and browned them in a skillet with olive oil. I then added a cup of chicken broth, covered the pan, reduced the heat, and braised the leeks for 30 minutes. The flavor was lovely—subtle and sweet - but the leeks were mushy and had begun to discolor. After experimenting with various cooking times, I found that about 10 minutes brought out plenty of sweetness and yielded tender, not mushy, leeks

They were delicious, but they needed a dressing. I combined some white wine vinegar, Dijon mustard, minced garlic, oil, salt, and pepper in a jar, screwed on the lid tightly; and shook the jar vigorously. I then drizzled the vinaigrette over the leeks. It was good, but it overshadowed, rather than amplified, the bright flavor of the leeks.

Maybe instead of discarding the now flavorful liquid I'd used for braising the leeks, I could use it to bolster the flavor of my dish. I had about ⅔ cup left in the skillet, but simply adding a bit of this liquid did not contribute much flavor. If I used more, the dressing was watery. I found success by simmering the liquid, still in the skillet, down to 2 tablespoons and adding it to the other dressing ingredients (leaving out the salt because the concentrated stock was salty). Chopped fresh tarragon added a subtle licorice like note

Finally, I had tender leeks and a flavorful, balanced vinaigrette—not to mention a simple new vegetable dish to spruce up my side dish repertoire

BRAISED LEEKS

Serves 4 to 6

We prefer to use eeks measuring 1 inch or less 'n diameter for this recipe because they're more tender than larger leeks Larger leeks will work, but discard their first two outer ayers because they tend to be fibrous. Orienting the leeks in one direct on makes them easier to transfer in and out of the skillet. When trimming the leeks, be careful to leave the root ends intact so that the layers stay together when the leeks are halved f you don't have a small jar with a lid, whisk the vinaigrette together in a bowl

- **3 pounds small (1-inch-diameter) leeks, white and light green parts only**
- **Salt and pepper**
- **6 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil**
- **1 cup chicken broth**
- **1 tablespoon white wine vinegar**
- **1 teaspoon Dijon mustard**
- **1 small garlic clove, minced**
- **1 tablespoon chopped fresh tarragon**

1. Trim roots from leeks, leaving ends intact so layers stay together when halved. Halve leeks lengthwise, wash thoroughly between layers to remove any dirt, and pat dry with paper towels Season cut sides with salt and pepper

2. Heat 1 tablespoon oil in 12 inch nonstick skillet over medium high heat until shimmering. Add half of leeks to skillet, with root ends pointed in same direction, and cook until browned, about 2 minutes per side. Transfer to plate. Repeat with 1 tablespoon oil and remaining leeks.

3. Return all leeks to skillet, facing same direction. Add broth and bring to boil. Cover, reduce heat to medium low, and simmer until leeks are tender when poked with tip of paring knife, 10 to 12 minutes. Using slotted spatula, transfer leeks to shallow serving platter, leaving braising liquid in skillet.

4. Increase heat to medium high and bring braising liquid to boil, cook until reduced to about 2 tablespoons, 2 to 4 minutes. Transfer braising liquid to small jar and add vinegar, mustard, garlic, remaining ¼ cup oil, ¼ teaspoon salt, and ¼ teaspoon pepper. Affix lid and shake jar vigorously until vinaigrette is emulsified, about 15 seconds. Spoon vinaigrette over leeks. Sprinkle with tarragon and serve

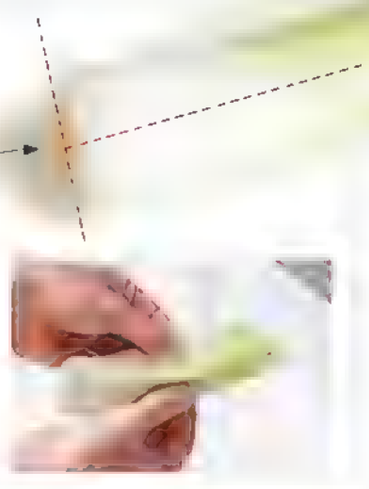
We use a bit of reserved braising liquid to add deep leek flavor to the simple dressing.

Prepping Leeks for Braising

For this recipe, choose leeks that measure 1 inch or less 'n diameter If you can find only larger eeks, remove the first two fibrous outer layers.

Carefully trim roots from leek bottoms, keeping ends intact so layers stay together when halved.

Halve each leek lengthwise, then rinse each half under cool running water, gently fanning out eaves to rinse between layers. Pat dry



Pork Marsala

Could we use pork in this sweet-savory weeknight supper without it drying out?

BY ASHLEY MOORE

VEAL MARSALA, THEN cutlets or medallions of meat served with mushrooms and sweet Marsala wine, is a ubiquitous menu item at Italian American restaurants. You'll find pork Marsala, too, but it tends to be dry and disappointing.

I knew I'd have to choose the right cut of pork, one that's easy to work with but also tender and quick cooking. Pork loin proved too tough, but pork tenderloin, cut into slices, worked better. After pounding the slices into thin cutlets, however, I found that they too easily overcooked. Instead, I settled on 1½ inch thick medallions. I could cut 12 from two tenderloins, enough to serve four people heartily or six less hungry people.

I was happy to find that my medallions all fit into a single 12 inch skillet. They developed a pleasantly brown crust after about 4 minutes on each side, by which time the meat registered 140 degrees inside—perfect. That is, except for the uneven end pieces, which cooked too quickly and got tough. The best solution was to trim off the narrow ends of the tenderloins before I portioned the rest into equal medallions.

I let the cooked pork rest while I made the rest of the dish. Seeing how some of the mushrooms turned soggy in my initial five recipe test, I turned to cremini mushrooms rather than regular button mushrooms, since they have a meatier texture and would hold up better. I also found that cooking the mushrooms first, until they were brown and tender, and then removing them from the skillet to cook the pork, gave me more consistent results, both in the meat and the mushrooms.

With the pork and mushroom sequence locked down, I moved on to the defining element of this dish: the Marsala sauce. I drew on a test kitchen recipe we've used in the past for chicken Marsala that achieves a fine balance of sweetness from Marsala wine, savoriness from chicken broth, and slight acidity from lemon juice. A tablespoon of flour for thickening, some aromatic shallots, and a final stir in of cold butter gave me the ideal consistency—just thick enough to coat the meat without being overly sweet.

Cancel your reservation at the Italian restaurant—dinner tonight comes from your own kitchen.

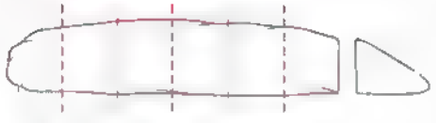
Because we use medallions rather than cutlets, our pork stays tender and moist.

INGREDIENT SPOTLIGHT

Marsala

Marsala, which comes from Sicily, is a fortified wine. This means that brandy or a neutral spirit has been added to it. It can be found in both sweet and dry styles, a classification based primarily on the residual sugar content of the wine. Aside from the obvious—sweet Marsala tasted sweeter than dry—the dry type features raisin and prune flavors balanced by sharp acidity and savory, nutty notes. Sweet Marsalas possess those same dried-fruit flavors but also offer hints of molasses and caramel. For this recipe, be sure to use the dry type.

TECHNIQUE



Making Pork Medallions

Cut away about 1 inch from tail of each tenderloin; reserve for another use. Cut each tenderloin crosswise into 6 equal medallions, about 1½ inches thick. Press medallions lightly to even thickness.

PORK MARSALA Serves 4 to 6

We trim off the narrow tail portions of the tenderloins to ensure evenly sized (and cooked) pork medallions. Reserve the trimmed pieces for another use. Be sure to buy dry Marsala, not sweet.

- 2 (12- to 16-ounce) pork tenderloins, trimmed
- Salt and pepper
- ¼ cup olive oil
- 12 ounces cremini mushrooms, trimmed and sliced thin
- 1 shallot, minced
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 tablespoon all-purpose flour
- 1 cup chicken broth
- ¾ cup dry Marsala
- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into 4 pieces and chilled
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh parsley

1. Cut 1 inch piece from tail end of each tenderloin, reserve for another use. Cut each tenderloin crosswise into 6 equal medallions, about 1½ inches thick. Press medallions lightly to even thickness, then pat dry with paper towels and season with salt and pepper.

2. Heat 1 tablespoon oil in 12 inch nonstick skillet over medium high heat until shimmering. Add mushrooms, ¼ teaspoon salt, and ¼ teaspoon pepper and cook, stirring occasionally, until liquid has evaporated and mushrooms are well browned, about 10 minutes. Transfer to bowl; cover to keep warm.

3. Add 2 tablespoons oil to now empty skillet and heat over medium high heat until just smoking. Add pork and cook until well browned and centers register 140 degrees, about 4 minutes per side. Transfer pork to platter and tent with aluminum foil.

4. Heat remaining 1 tablespoon oil in now-empty skillet over medium high heat until shimmering. Add shallot, garlic, flour, ¼ teaspoon salt, and ¼ teaspoon pepper and cook until shallot is softened, about 1 minute. Stir in broth and Marsala and bring to boil. Cook until reduced to 1 cup and slightly thickened, about 5 minutes.

5. Reduce heat to low and whisk in butter, 1 piece at a time, until emulsified. Stir in lemon juice, parsley, mushrooms, and any accumulated pork juices. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Spoon sauce over pork and serve.

Illustration: Jay Lyman

Crispy Skillet Turkey Burgers

A juicy, flavorful turkey burger would be good enough—but we wanted crispy edges, too.

BY KATIE LEAIRD

So much can go wrong with a turkey burger. Even when made with care, it can be dry, dense, or totally lacking in flavor. We've cracked the code before in the test kitchen, but our process involved grinding our own turkey meat. I wanted a moist, flavorful turkey burger using store-bought ground turkey. And what's more, I wanted slightly crispy edges.

First I had to rectify the pitfalls of most turkey burgers—dryness and denseness—without changing the culprits: the relative lack of fat and the need to cook turkey to 160 degrees.

To fight dryness, you can add moisture, which usually means adding fat. Using fattier ground turkey (usually a blend of white and dark meat and about 93 percent lean) instead of ground turkey breast (white meat only and up to 99 percent lean) made a difference. So did adding a bit of mayonnaise to the mix, which was easy to incorporate.

But in the end it was the density of bad turkey burgers that clued me in to the most transformative fix: a panade. We often add a panade of bread crumbs and dairy to our meatloaf mixture to create juicy pockets within the ground meat and keep it from coagulating too tightly when cooked. Much like meat loaf, my turkey burgers needed a bit of internal physical disruption to keep them from being so dense.

After several experiments, I settled on a combination of panko bread crumbs and shredded cheese; with the mayonnaise, this served as a panade. The cheese—just 2 ounces for four burgers—also added a delicate savory flavor. And the exposed cheese on the tops and bottoms of the burgers crisped up into a browned, *frico*-like crust—a crispy, savory foil to the tender juiciness inside.

Talk about easy: All four burgers could be cooked together in a nonstick skillet over medium heat until deeply browned and crunchy. Flipping the burgers just once made the process a snap. My final recipe required no more than 10 minutes and one skillet.

Since the flavors of the mayonnaise and cheese are subtle, these burgers are great canvases for any additional flavors. Standards like ketchup, mustard, lettuce, and tomato dress up the turkey burgers in a classic style. If you like southwestern flavors, try layering some pickled jalapeños on the patties and a smear of mashed avocado on the buns. Or give the burgers a smoky slant with some barbecue sauce and a couple of slices of bacon.

CRISPY SKILLET TURKEY BURGERS

Serves 4

Be sure to use 93 percent lean ground turkey, not 99 percent fat-free ground turkey breast, in this recipe or the burgers will be tough. Serve with your favorite burger toppings, including Pickled Onions (recipe follows).

- **1 pound ground turkey**
- **1 cup panko bread crumbs**
- **2 ounces Monterey Jack cheese, shredded (½ cup)**
- **¼ cup mayonnaise**
- **Salt and pepper**
- **1 tablespoon vegetable oil**
- **4 hamburger buns, toasted and buttered**

1. Combine turkey, panko, Monterey Jack, mayonnaise, ½ teaspoon salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper in bowl. Using your hands, pat turkey mixture into four ¾-inch-thick patties, about 4 inches in diameter. Season patties with salt and pepper.

2. Heat oil in 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium heat until shimmering. Add patties and cook until well browned and meat registers 160 degrees, about 5 minutes per side.

3. Place burgers on buns and serve.

PICKLED ONIONS

Makes about 2 cups

- **1 small red onion, halved and sliced thin**
- **2 jalapeño chiles, stemmed and sliced into thin rings**
- **1 cup white wine vinegar**
- **2 tablespoons lime juice**
- **1 tablespoon sugar**
- **1 teaspoon salt**

Combine onion and jalapeños in medium bowl. Bring vinegar, lime juice, sugar, and salt to boil in small saucepan. Pour vinegar mixture over onion mixture and let sit for at least 30 minutes. (Pickled onions can be made in advance and refrigerated for up to 1 week.)

Sure, they're juicy, but what made these burgers the talk of the kitchen was their crispy exteriors.

KEY INGREDIENTS

Panko, Mayo, and Cheese

Most supermarket ground turkey is very lean and has a tendency to cook up dry. Our three key mix-ins—bread crumbs, mayonnaise, and cheese—help solve this problem, creating a burger that's juicy on the inside and crispy on the outside.

When shopping for ground turkey, look for 93 percent lean meat—not 99 percent lean. (Fat content is indicated on the label but is not always listed prominently.) Your best bet? Ask the butcher to grind it for you. The coarser grind of store-ground meat will give you the most tender, most juicy burger of all. Mayonnaise adds fat to the lean meat, and panko bread crumbs prevent it from becoming too dense. Shredded Monterey Jack cooks up into a well-browned, crispy, cheesy crust.

TERRIFIC TRIO
Panko prevents the meat from becoming dense as it cooks. Mayonnaise adds fat for juiciness. And grated Monterey Jack creates a crispy, cheesy crust.

Cast Iron Calzone

Handheld calzones are great. But we wanted something bigger.

BY RUSSELL SELANDER

THE CALZONE, SIMILAR to pizza, has been a mainstay in America since the dish traveled here with Italians in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. These half moon shaped hand pies were popular midday meals, often sold from carts and eaten on the run. I set out to reinvent the calzone as a shareable meal serving several people.

Step one: I ruled out the half moon pies in favor of a single large, circular calzone. To keep it easy, I started with store bought pizza dough (though homemade worked just as well).

I knew that a cast iron skillet would be an ideal vessel because I could use it first to cook the meat and then again as the perfect baking vessel. Its high sides would allow for easy assembly and keep this massive calzone contained while also conducting heat directly onto the crust, producing a crisp chewy texture.

For my filling, I settled on two cheeses: creamy ricotta for richness and melty mozzarella for gooeyness. Crumbled Italian sausage and sliced pepperoni, seared in the skillet and drained on a paper towel lined plate to remove excess grease, made this a meat lover's dream. Marinara sauce was a must, and fresh basil added just a bit of freshness.

Next, it was time for construction. I kneaded 2 pounds of pizza dough and split it into two portions, using the bigger portion (two thirds of the dough) for the larger bottom crust. I rolled this out and nestled it into the pan. Atop, I sprinkled a cup of mozzarella and then about ½ pound of sausage and pepperoni, which I'd stirred together with the ricotta and basil. Next came marinara sauce and another cup of mozzarella. I laid the remaining dough over the top, sliced in some air vents, sealed the edges with an egg wash, and pinched the sides together.

Nailing the best oven temperature and placement took some experimentation. Too cold and the crust didn't crisp up; too hot and the crust just overcooked. I settled on 450 degrees and the lower middle rack, which kept the top from getting too dark while the filling got hot. After about 30 minutes, I pulled out a golden brown, aromatic calzone.

But there was too much dough for the amount of filling. So for my next test, I doubled the filling to include more than a pound of meat, 8 ounces of ricotta, and a full pound of mozzarella. Once the calzone was baked, I let it cool for about 30 minutes before effortlessly popping the entire calzone out of the pan. I was delighted to find that I could easily slice it into wedges, with strings of gooey mozzarella forming as I pulled the first piece away. Perfect.

CAST-IRON SKILLET CALZONE

Serves 8

Room-temperature dough is much easier to shape than cold dough, so pull the dough from the fridge about 1 hour before you plan to start cooking. Use low-sodium marinara sauce to prevent the calzone from becoming overly salty.

- **2 teaspoons extra-virgin olive oil**
- **1 pound sweet or hot Italian sausage, casings removed**
- **4 ounces thinly sliced pepperoni, quartered**
- **2 garlic cloves, minced**
- **2 (1-pound) balls pizza dough, room temperature**
- **1 pound mozzarella cheese, shredded (4 cups)**
- **8 ounces (1 cup) whole-milk ricotta cheese**
- **2 tablespoons chopped fresh basil**
- **1 teaspoon pepper**
- **1 cup low-sodium marinara sauce, plus extra for serving**
- **1 large egg, lightly beaten with 2 tablespoons water**
- **2 teaspoons toasted sesame seeds**

1. Adjust oven rack to lower-middle position and heat oven to 450 degrees. Heat 12 inch cast iron skillet over medium heat for 3 minutes. Add oil and heat until shimmering. Add sausage and pepperoni and cook, breaking up meat with wooden spoon, until sausage is no longer pink, 5 to 7 minutes. Stir in garlic and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Using slotted spoon, transfer meat mixture to paper towel lined plate. Wipe skillet clean with paper towels.

2. Knead dough balls together on lightly floured counter to create 1 large ball, 8 to 10 turns. Divide dough ball into two thirds and one third (one 22 ounce piece and one 10 ounce piece).

3. Press and roll larger piece of dough into 16-inch round. (Keep remaining dough covered with greased plastic wrap.) Loosely roll dough around rolling pin and gently unroll it onto now empty skillet, letting excess dough hang over edge. Ease dough into skillet by gently lifting edge of dough with your hand while pressing into skillet bottom with your other hand. Some dough will overhang edge of skillet, leave in place.

Store-bought pizza dough and marinara take this from an all-day project to a weeknight supper.

4. Sprinkle 2 cups mozzarella over surface of dough. Combine ricotta, basil, pepper, and meat mixture in bowl. Dollop ricotta mixture over mozzarella and press into even layer. Spread marinara over top, then sprinkle with remaining 2 cups mozzarella.

5. Brush overhanging dough with some of egg wash. Press and roll remaining dough piece into 14-inch circle; loosely roll dough around rolling pin and gently unroll it onto skillet. Trim overhang to ½ inch beyond edge of skillet. Pinch edges of top and bottom crusts firmly together. Tuck overhang under itself; folded edge should be flush with edge of skillet. Crimp dough with tines of fork.

6. Brush top of calzone with remaining egg wash and sprinkle with sesame seeds. Using paring knife, cut eight 1 inch vents in top of dough in circular pattern. Transfer skillet to oven and bake until crust is golden brown, about 30 minutes, rotating skillet halfway through baking.

7. Transfer skillet to wire rack and let calzone cool for 30 minutes. Using spatula, slide calzone onto cutting board. Slice into wedges and serve, passing extra marinara separately.

Stovetop-Roasted Chicken

Crispy-skinned chicken pieces on top of the stove, with no mess and no fuss? An unconventional method makes it easy. BY DIANE UNGER

BONE-IN CHICKEN PARTS, from kid friendly drumsticks to parent pleasing breasts and thighs, are one of my favorite weeknight suppers. Bone in pieces are juicier and more economical than bone less. But they are usually relegated to the oven, and they take time to cook. I wanted roast chicken flavor with crispy skin in one skillet on the stovetop, with delicious browned bits left in the skillet to make a pan sauce

The variables: which pan to use and at what temperature, if and when to flip the pieces, and if and when to cover them. I tested a variety of techniques, but none was easy or foolproof enough. Then I came across a method that intrigued me: chicken arranged skin side down in a cold nonstick skillet.

Why not? I nestled the pieces in the skillet and then turned the heat to high. Once the skin had browned, I covered the skillet to help the chicken cook through. I was sure the chicken was going to stick to the skillet, or worse, turn out steamy and greasy. But to my surprise, the skin was golden and crispy and the meat supertender. The stove, however, was a mess, splattered with chicken grease from corner to corner.

So for my next test, I again placed the chicken in a cold nonstick skillet, but this time I covered the pan before browning the chicken over a more mod erate medium heat, hoping that covering the skillet the whole time would trap the mess and keep the chicken moist. After about 15 minutes, I cranked the heat to medium high and cooked the chicken 10 to 15 minutes longer. Bingo: The skin was deep golden brown, and every piece was cooked through and juicy.

TEST KITCHEN TRICK

Browning Like You've Never Seen

Placing the chicken in a cold nonstick skillet and covering it before turning on the heat gives the fatty skin time to slowly render and turn deeply browned and crispy.

The gorgeous browned bits in the pan were perfect for a quick sauce. I cooked rosemary and garlic until they were fragrant and added lemon juice and water. Off heat, I whisked in butter and chives Adding capers, sun dried tomatoes, or cornichons with other herbs made easy, flavorful variations

STOVETOP-ROASTED CHICKEN WITH LEMON-HERB SAUCE

Serves 4

For even cooking, it's important to buy chicken pieces within the specifications given. If you prefer all dark meat, this recipe will work with a total of eight bone-in thighs or drumsticks. If you prefer all white meat, you can use four bone-in breasts. Note that the chicken is started in a cold skillet to give the fat time to render

CHICKEN

- **2 (10- to 12-ounce) bone-in split chicken breasts, trimmed**
- **4 (5- to 7-ounce) bone-in chicken thighs or drumsticks, trimmed**
- **Salt and pepper**
- **½ teaspoon minced fresh rosemary**

HERB SAUCE

- **2 garlic cloves, minced**
- **½ teaspoon minced fresh rosemary**
- **2 tablespoons water**
- **½ teaspoon grated lemon zest plus 1 tablespoon juice**
- **6 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into 6 pieces**
- **1 tablespoon minced fresh chives**
- **Salt and pepper**

1. FOR THE CHICKEN Pat chicken dry with paper towels. Place breasts on cutting board, bone side down, and cover with plastic wrap. Using meat pounder, pound thick ends of breasts to ¾- to 1 inch thickness. Season all chicken pieces with salt and pepper Place chicken, skin side down, in cold 12 inch nonstick skillet and sprinkle with rosemary.

2. Cover skillet and place over medium heat. (If using electric stove, preheat burner for 3 minutes over medium heat.) Cook chicken, without moving it, until skin is light golden brown, about 15 minutes.

3. Increase heat to medium high and continue to cook, covered, until skin is deep golden brown and crispy and breasts register 160 degrees and thighs/drumsticks register at least 175 degrees, 10 to 15 minutes longer, rotating skillet halfway through cook ing (If using drumsticks, flip them during last 5 minutes of cooking.) Transfer chicken, skin side up, to plat ter and tent with aluminum foil

4. FOR THE HERB SAUCE: While chicken rests, pour off all but 2 tea spoons fat from skillet. Add garlic and rosemary and cook over medium heat until fragrant, about 30 seconds, scrap ing up any browned bits. Off heat, stir in water and lemon zest and juice. Whisk in butter, 1 piece at a time, until smooth and emulsified.

5. Stir in chives and any accumu lated chicken juices; season with salt and pepper to taste. Spoon sauce over chicken and serve.

Our bright pan sauce, made with fresh rosemary and chives, gives this dish a vibrant finish.

STOVETOP-ROASTED CHICKEN WITH LEMON-CAPER SAUCE

Add 2 tablespoons minced capers to skillet with garlic in step 4. Substitute ½ teaspoon minced fresh thyme for chives

STOVETOP-ROASTED CHICKEN WITH LEMON-CORNICHON SAUCE

Add 2 tablespoons minced cornichons to skillet with garlic in step 4. Substi tute 2 teaspoons minced fresh tarragon for chives.

STOVETOP-ROASTED CHICKEN WITH LEMON–SUN-DRIED TOMATO SAUCE

Add ¼ cup oil packed sun dried toma toes, chopped, to skillet with garlic in step 4. Increase rosemary in sauce to 1 teaspoon and omit chives

Chocolate Haupia Cream Pie

The name takes some sounding out, but once we'd settled the recipe, this Hawaiian pie was the talk of the test kitchen. BY CECELIA JENKINS

THE FIRM PUDDING made with coconut milk and customarily served in chilled cubes is known as haupia (pronounced how-PEE-ah) in Hawaii. Though it's wonderful on its own, why not put it in a pie? And for that matter, why not put it in a two-tone pie with melted chocolate added to one layer? This is not just a good idea—it's a delicious reality at Hawaiian bakeries such as Ted's, located on Oahu. I wanted to bring it home to my kitchen.

Rather than the rich, ploppable stuff you usually think of as pudding, haupia is firmer. Experiments with existing recipes gave me haupia that resembled bouncy Jell-O and was far too sweet. I wanted stable yet delicate pudding, balanced but insistent coconut flavor, and measured sweetness.

I also wanted my pie to be easy, so I decided up front to use a store-bought pie crust, which I baked until it was golden brown and flaky. I then set it aside to cool and got to work on the filling.

Haupia's key ingredient is coconut milk. To ensure a thick pudding, I knew I'd need a product with plenty of fat (our favorite is Chaokoh). I whisked a 13.5-ounce can of coconut milk together with 1 cup of water, ½ cup of sugar, and 3 tablespoons of cornstarch and cooked the lot in a saucepan over medium heat until it began to thicken, about 6 minutes.

Next, I melted 4 ounces of chopped semisweet chocolate in the microwave and stirred it together with half the pudding. I spread this chocolaty mixture into the cooled pie shell and rewhisked the remaining coconut pudding in the saucepan to smooth out any lumps that had formed while it sat. I then poured it on top of the chocolate layer, spreading it evenly with a spatula. I chilled the pie in the fridge until I was certain it had set up completely, about 4 hours.

Slicing into this first attempt, my heart sank. The knife mushed the layers together, leaving me with a droopy, sad blob that ran all over the plate—not the perfect, semifirm, two-tone slice I'd imagined. And my layers were uneven, with the chocolate layer much too thick.

To address the consistency of the pudding, I increased the amount of cornstarch to 5 tablespoons, but this gave me a too-firm filling that I could bounce a nickel off (true story; I tried). Decreasing the cornstarch to 4 tablespoons proved best for creating clean slices.

One ingredient was bugging me: water. I knew I needed the liquid to dissolve the cornstarch and achieve the consistency I sought, but I wondered. Would a more flavorful liquid give me a better pie? To find out, I made three pies: one with water, one with milk, and one with an additional cup of coconut milk.

The pie with the extra coconut milk tasted chalky and a bit sour; the pie with water was too lean. But the pie with milk had rich, round coconut flavor. Further testing showed me that both whole milk and 2 percent low-fat milk worked fine, but skim milk was a bust.

I looked over my method for more ways to streamline it, and found that I could ditch the microwave and simply pour the hot pudding over the chopped chocolate to let its residual heat do the work. After a few more experiments, I determined that rather than dividing the pudding equally and adding chocolate to one portion, dividing it slightly unevenly and mixing the chocolate with just a cup of the hot pudding created perfectly equal layers.

To finish things off, I piped sweetened whipped cream on top of the pie. I then sliced it and stood back while coworkers dove in like surfers along Waikiki Beach.

A blanket of whipped cream stars is traditional, but we won't tell if you prefer simpler dollops.

CHOCOLATE HAUPIA CREAM PIE

Serves 8 to 10

We prefer Chaokoh or Thai Kitchen coconut milk for this recipe. Do not use "lite" coconut milk or any coconut milk that has less than 12 grams of fat and/or greater than 3 grams of sugar per ⅓-cup serving. If you do, the pudding will be too runny and sweet. While we prefer whole milk in this recipe, 2 percent low-fat milk will also work. We use a pastry bag outfitted with a star tip to decorate the pie with whipped cream. Our favorite piping set is the Wilton 20-Piece Beginning Buttercream Decorating Set.

CRUST

- **1 (9-inch) store-bought pie dough round**

FILLING

- **4 ounces semisweet chocolate, chopped**
- **1 (13.5-ounce) can unsweetened coconut milk**
- **1 cup whole milk**
- **½ cup (3½ ounces) sugar**
- **¼ cup (1 ounce) cornstarch**
- **⅛ teaspoon salt**

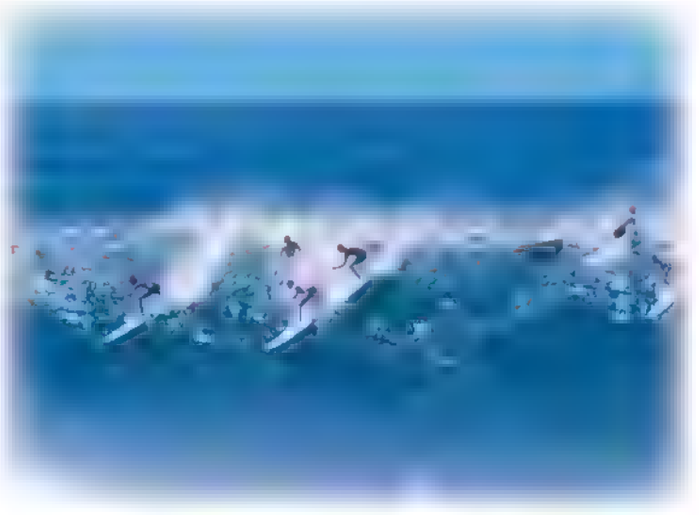
TOPPING

- **1 cup heavy cream, chilled**
- **1 tablespoon sugar**

1. **FOR THE CRUST:** Adjust oven rack to lower-middle position and heat oven to 375 degrees. Roll dough into 12-inch circle on lightly floured counter. Loosely roll dough around rolling pin and gently unroll it onto 9-inch pie plate, letting excess dough hang over edge. Ease dough into plate by gently lifting edge of dough with your hand while pressing into plate bottom with your other hand.

2. Trim overhang to ½ inch beyond lip of plate. Tuck overhang under itself, folded edge should be flush with edge of plate. Crimp dough evenly around edge of plate using your fingers. Wrap dough-lined plate loosely in plastic wrap and freeze until dough is firm, about 15 minutes.

3. Line chilled pie shell with parchment paper or double layer of aluminum foil, covering edges to prevent burning, and fill with pie weights. Bake until edges are light golden brown, about 20 minutes, rotating plate halfway through baking. Remove parchment



The American Table
Monster Waves, Monster Pie

Long before Oahu's North Shore became the tourist haven it is today, it was a stretch of cow pastures known only to local ranchers and a small community of die-hard counterculture surfers, who considered the area's "monster" waves among the best in the world. It was here, just a few miles from the legendary Wa'imea Bay, that local farmer Takemitsu Nakamura, a second-generation American, opened the Sunset Beach Store with his wife, Eva, in 1956. The modest shop functioned as a general store in the sparsely populated area.

Thirty years later, Nakamura's son Ted integrated a bakery into the store, fueling those brave (some would say foolhardy) surfers with an appropriately caloric diet of doughnuts, breads, and cakes.

Ted's Bakery soon became the most profitable piece of the family business. He added pies to the menu—macadamia cream pie, *lilikoi* (passion fruit) pie, and chocolate haupia pie. At first the bakers produced 20 pies a day to sell on site, but once local restaurants caught wind of how good they were, Ted's began taking commercial orders. Before long, Ted's Bakery was baking more than 15,000 pies a week for restaurants all over the island. Today, chocolate haupia pie is a popular dessert not only on any given Tuesday but for marquee holidays as well—many Hawaiian households now consider it an essential element of a Thanksgiving or Christmas spread.

Visit any Hawaiian island these days and you'll encounter versions of chocolate haupia pie at fancy restaurants and modest storefront bakeries alike. But pie purists, just like those intrepid surfers, still make the pilgrimage to the original Ted's Bakery, where they line up for slices of chocolate haupia pie even as monster waves crash onto Sunset Beach, just across the Kamehameha Highway.

and weights and continue to bake until crust is golden brown, 7 to 11 minutes longer. Let crust cool completely in plate on wire rack before proceeding with filling, about 45 minutes. (Baked, cooled crust can be wrapped in plastic wrap and stored at room temperature for up to 24 hours.)

4. FOR THE FILLING: Once crust has cooled completely, place chocolate in medium bowl; set aside. Whisk coconut milk, milk, sugar, cornstarch, and salt in medium saucepan until no lumps of cornstarch remain. Cook over medium heat, stirring and scraping saucepan corners constantly with rubber spatula, until mixture thickens to glue-like consistency and large bubbles break surface, about 6 minutes.

5. Quickly pour 1 cup coconut pudding over chocolate in bowl and whisk until smooth. Spread chocolate pudding evenly in cooled pie shell. Using clean, dry whisk, vigorously rewhisk remaining coconut pudding in saucepan, then gently pour on top of chocolate pudding and spread into even layer with rubber spatula. Refrigerate, uncovered, until set, at least 3 hours or up to 24 hours.

6. FOR THE TOPPING: Once pie is fully chilled, use stand mixer fitted with whisk attachment to whip cream and sugar on medium-low speed until foamy, about 1 minute. Increase speed to high and whip until stiff peaks form, 1 to 3 minutes. Transfer whipped cream to pastry bag fitted with medium open or closed star tip (about ½ inch diameter). Pipe whipped cream stars onto top of pie until completely covered. Serve.

Should You Buy a Cream Whipper?

There are few desserts that aren't improved by a swirl of fresh whipped cream. The easiest way to make it is to use a cream whipper, a pressurized canister powered by nitrous oxide. You simply fill the canister with heavy cream, twist on a single-use nitrous oxide charger, shake to distribute the gas, and press a lever to pipe out swirls and rosettes. But many cream whippers retail for upwards of $100.00. Are they worth the expense?

Eager to find out, we rounded up nine cream whippers, priced from $29.99 to $115.90, and used each to pipe a pint's worth of 2-inch whipped cream rosettes using every included decorating tip. We also had five testers—men and women, lefties and righties, pros and novices—use and evaluate each whipper.

Rosettes are a good test of piping control.

Testers immediately zeroed in on the appearance of the whipped cream. Only a few models made swirls that were uniform, fluffy, and detailed; most produced misshapen, gloppy rosettes. The decorating tips weren't the problem, rather, we found that the unattractive, blobby rosettes were a result of testers having trouble gripping the canisters and using the dispensing mechanisms. Testers of all sizes preferred shorter canisters, which were easier to move and angle when dispensing the cream.

Testers struggled to control hard-to-grip, heavy, or sticky levers (one model with a button instead of a lever was immediately singled out as awkward); this lack of control resulted in blobby, unattractive rosettes. Top-performing products had smaller, more secure grips that allowed more leverage to dispense cream evenly and make perfect, detailed swirls. We also gave more points to whippers that felt sturdy and that were easy to load, charge with gas, change tips, empty, and clean.

We think the convenience of a good cream whipper is worth paying for. Our top two options are priced at $99.27 and $69.00 but produced flawless results (note that iSi also makes our lowest-rated whipper, so check the model numbers). Visit **CooksCountry.com/jan17** for the full testing results. –LAUREN SAVOIE

KEY: **Good** ★★★ **Fair** ★★ **Poor** ★

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

iSi Gourmet Whip
Model: 1603.01 **Price:** $99.27
Price of Chargers: $31.97 for 50 branded chargers ($0.64 per charger)
Number of Tips: 3 **Height:** 7.75 in
Distance to Reach Lever: 3.6 in
Dishwasher-Safe: Yes

CRITERIA	
Comfort	★★★
Control	★★★
Dispensing	★★★
Ease of Setup	★★★

TESTERS' NOTES: Testers thought this whipper's shorter stature, rubber grip, and responsive lever made for effortless control, and both novices and pros easily piped uniform rosettes. Grips on the handle and neck made refilling and cleaning speedy.

RECOMMENDED

MOSA Professional Whipper 0.5 Liter
Model: CSS2 **Price:** $69.00
Price of Chargers: $45.39 for 100 generic chargers ($0.45 per charger)
Number of Tips: 3 **Height:** 8.3 in
Distance to Reach Lever: 3.6 in
Dishwasher-Safe: Yes

CRITERIA	
Comfort	★★★
Control	★★★
Dispensing	★★
Ease of Setup	★★★

TESTERS' NOTES: This whipper's lever was easy to grasp, and testers praised its steady flow and attractive piping. Its wider decorating tips made rosettes that were perfectly fluffy. Our one gripe was that its narrowest tip produced a skinny, shaggy stream of cream.

TEST KITCHEN TECHNIQUE
Piping Whipped Cream

Fit a pastry bag with a medium (½-inch diameter) star pastry tip. An open tip will give a soft appearance; a closed tip (pictured here) will make a tighter star with hard lines. Using gentle pressure and working in concentric circles, pipe even-size stars over the top of the pie. (Alternatively, pipe stars in straight lines across the pie.)

INGREDIENT SPOTLIGHT
Coconut Milk

Coconut milk, not to be confused with coconut water, is made by steeping shredded coconut meat in water or milk. The meat is pressed or mashed to release as much liquid as possible and the liquid squeezed out and strained for a smooth texture.

In a test kitchen taste test, the winning **Chaokoh Coconut Milk** was voted the "creamiest" in the lineup.

Photos: Grant Rohloff, VintageSurfArt.com; (top left) Steve Klise (top right)

Getting to Know Blue Cheese

While all blue cheeses get their flavor from harmless blue mold, different types vary wildly. Here's a guide to 12 funky blues.

BY CHRISTIE MORRISON

Danish Blue

GREAT DANE

"Boom! Pow! There's that blue cheese flavor," said one taster of this cheese. Danish Blue (or Danablu) is a powerful and complex cheese made from cow's milk and homogenized cream. It has a strong salty, tangy flavor with a slightly sweet finish. Its creamy yet crumbly semisoft texture is spotted with silvery blue pockets. It makes a great dessert cheese served with stone fruit or pears.

Roquefort

DEEP POCKETS

France's "cheese of kings and popes," once favored by Charlemagne, is a creamy, pungent sheep's-milk cheese produced in the Roquefort-sur-Soulzon region. Ivory-colored and pocketed with large clumps of dark green-blue mold (*Penicillium roqueforti*), Roquefort is "luxurious" and "supercreamy," with crystal-like granules that vary the texture. Its pungent flavor has a bit of sweetness and "a little sharpness that lingers at the back of the throat." Great for melting, it is also a star on a cheese plate.

Cashel Blue

ERIN GO BLUE

Cashel Blue cheese is a semisoft cow's-milk cheese that has been made in County Tipperary, Ireland since 1984. The cheese uses *Penicillium roqueforti*, but the mold spores are stirred into the warm milk rather than being injected into the cheese. This process results in the marble-like pattern of blue-green mold in the light-colored cheese. Tasters commented on the "buttery" flavor and "briny" notes as well as the creamy but "slightly granular" texture.

Cabrales

SPANISH GOLD

Cabrales is made in Asturias, Spain, from cow's milk or a mixture of cow's, sheep's, and goat's milk and is aged in limestone caves for two to four months. Cabrales is not injected with mold like other blue cheeses; humidity in the caves fosters the growth of a particular mold that cures from the outside of the cheese to the center. The cheese has a "spicy, peppery kick" and a semifirm, crumbly, chalky texture.

Stilton

BOLD BRIT

By law, this cow's-milk English cheese can be produced in only three counties—Derbyshire, Leicestershire, and Nottinghamshire. The distinctive blue lines are created by piercing the cheese with long needles to allow bacteria to infiltrate. Stilton is recognizable by its reddish-gold rind and its butter-colored interior. Our tasters praised its "tangy," "sharp" flavor and creamy crumbly texture.

Gorgonzola

ITALIAN STAR

Produced in the Lombardy and Piedmont regions of Italy, Gorgonzola is a cow's-milk cheese available in two varieties: *dolce* (sweet) and *piccante* (also called naturale or mountain). The dolce version, which is more common in the United States, is aged for only two to three months versus piccante's six. Tasters loved dolce's ultracreamy texture, subtle spice, and "sweet finish." The mild blue flavor of Gorgonzola works well in our Cantaloupe and Blue Cheese Salad **(CooksCountry.com/cbcsalad)**.

Saga Blue

BRIE BLEND

This mild blue cheese is actually a hybrid cross of blue cheese and Brie. Produced in Denmark from pasteurized cow's milk, the cheese is blue-veined and soft-ripened. Some tasters detected a slightly sharp, almost cheddar-like note and a "creamy but bracing bite." It is perfect on burgers or spread on crackers.

Cambozola

DEUTSCH BLAU

This German cow's-milk blue cheese is a cross between Camembert and Gorgonzola. Its triple-cream (at least 75 percent milk fat) base is Brie-like: creamy, soft, and buttery. In fact, it's often referred to as "blue Brie." The grayish-blue mold cuts through the richness, giving it a light funk on the finish. Tasters noted its nutty, mildly peppery flavor and slight tang.

Valdeon

ALL WRAPPED UP

This assertive, complex cheese, a blend of pasteurized cow's and goat's milks, hails from Castile-León in northwestern Spain. Valdeon is wrapped in sycamore leaves before being aged in caves for at least two months. This firm, crumbly cheese has a bluish-gray base color that is speckled with dots of blue mold. The full-flavored cheese is pleasantly "gamy" and slightly astringent. Serve it with fruit or preserves.

Bleu d'Auvergne

POWERFULLY PUNGENT

Some of the best cheeses are the stinkiest, and rich, funky, salty Bleu d'Auvergne is a prime example. Produced in the mountainous Massif Central region of France, it is made in the Roquefort style but uses cow's, rather than sheep's, milk (and is about half the price of Roquefort). Like Roquefort, it is soft and creamy, with pungent "blue" flavor and a strong aftertaste.

Stella Blue

CRUMBLY CHARACTER

This cow's-milk blue from Wisconsin is almost feta-like: firm, crumbly, mild, and salty. Because it is not relatively potent or complex, Stella is an excellent choice for a blue cheese salad dressing recipe; as a bonus, it crumbles readily and so is easy to work with. This mild cheese also works well in our Devils on Horseback **(CooksCountry.com/devils)**.

Holiday Eggnog

Grocery store eggnog doesn't hold a cup to the real stuff.

BY MORGAN BOLLING

IF THE ONLY "eggnog" you've experienced is the prefab stuff you find in the dairy case around the holidays, you're forgiven for not liking it much. You're also forgiven for not knowing what it is. Most commercial eggnogs consist of milk pumped full of factory produced stabilizers, yellow food coloring, and sweeteners. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration, in fact, requires just 1 percent of the drink to be actual egg yolk solids.

I long ago swore off eggnog, having never actually tried the real thing So on a recent afternoon in the test kitchen, faced with the task of mixing up six existing eggnog recipes for a tasting, I didn't know what to expect. But I was happily surprised.

Real eggnog is made from a few simple ingredients: milk, eggs, sugar, nutmeg, and booze (rum, brandy, or bourbon). After sipping all six samples, my tasters and I decided to aim for an eggnog that would be just a touch sweet, creamy (but not too heavy), and fortified with a definite note of spirits And while serious nogsters are split on whether to cook eggnog or whether to simply serve it raw, we settled on cooking the eggnog gently on the stovetop. Doing so gave us a slightly more nuanced flavor and also put to rest any safety concerns about serving uncooked eggs. I found that the best way to achieve a velvety texture with no scrambled eggs is to whisk together the egg yolks and sugar and pour heated milk over them, whisking constantly, before pouring the whole lot back into the pan and bringing it up, slowly, to 160 degrees—the safety zone.

My working formula consisted of 4½ cups of milk, 6 egg yolks (we preferred just yolks to whole eggs), and ½ cup of sugar, whisked until frothy and thick. We found this a bit sweet one taster said it tasted like melted ice cream –so I cut back on the sugar and added a bit of salt to enhance the flavor. I was getting somewhere

But a couple of longtime eggnog fans felt that the mixture was still a bit thin. So I ditched 1½ cups of the milk and replaced them with heavy cream: ¾ cup of cream whisked into the eggs and sugar and another ¾ cup frothed and folded in at the end.

About the booze: I settled on ½ cup of rum for 6 cups of nog—just enough to give it a vigorous punch. For an alcohol free version, I used root beer instead; it added some of the same caramel notes that come from rum

To finish off my nog, I stirred in ¼ teaspoon of potent ground nutmeg, passing extra for those who wanted an additional dusting on top. My home made eggnog was creamy, comforting, and festive. It's a shame I'll only have it once a year. Or will I?

EGGNOG **Makes about 6 cups; serves 6 to 8**
We prefer dark rum, but you can substitute brandy or bourbon, if desired

- **1½ cups heavy cream**
- **6 large egg yolks**
- **6 tablespoons sugar**
- **3 cups whole milk**
- **¼ teaspoon salt**
- **½ cup dark rum**
- **¼ teaspoon ground nutmeg, plus extra for serving**

1. Whisk ¾ cup cream, egg yolks, and sugar in medium bowl until thoroughly combined and pale yellow, about 30 seconds; set aside. Bring milk and salt to simmer in medium sauce pan over medium high heat, stirring occasionally.

2. When milk mixture comes to simmer, remove from heat and, whisking constantly, slowly pour into yolk mixture to temper. Return milk yolk mixture to saucepan. Place over medium low heat and cook, whisking constantly, until mixture reaches 160 degrees, 1 to 2 minutes.

3. Immediately pour eggnog into clean bowl. Stir in rum and nutmeg Fill slightly larger bowl with ice and set eggnog bowl in ice bowl. Refrigerate until eggnog registers 40 degrees, 1 to 2 hours, stirring occasionally

4. Just before serving, using stand mixer fitted with whisk attachment, whip remaining ¾ cup cream on medium low speed until foamy, about 1 minute. Increase speed to high and whip until soft peaks form, 1 to 3 minutes. Whisk whipped cream into chilled eggnog. Serve, garnished with extra nutmeg. (Eggnog can be covered and refrigerated for up to 24 hours.)

NONALCOHOLIC EGGNOG
Reduce sugar to ¼ cup and substitute root beer for rum.

After trying brandy, bourbon, and rum, we settled on the potent, caramel-like flavor of rum

The American Table
A Nog for the Road

We associate eggnog with the holiday season, but it wasn't always so. In colonial times, hardworking farm laborers and seafarers sucked it down during the day, and roadside inns and taverns served it as a fortifying drink for travelers The basic makeup of eggnog has changed very little since then; as Isaac Weld wrote in his 1799 book *Travels Through the States of North America* "The American travellers, before they pursued their journey, took a hearty draught each, according to custom, of egg-nog, a mixture composed of new milk, eggs, rum, and sugar beat up together"

Photo: INTERFOTO/Alamy Stock Photo

Boneless Rib Roast and Yorkshire Pudding

We wanted to bring these two classics together in one pan.

BY MORGAN BOLLING

As our friends in the United Kingdom have known for generations, a crusty, custardy Yorkshire pudding is without peer as an accompaniment to a resplendent roast beef. It swabs up and soaks up all those drippings and gravy in the most rewarding way. This year I set out to create a foolproof recipe for both items—roast and pudding—that would have them ready for the table at the same time.

I started, naturally, with the beef. While I love the impressive stature of a bone-in standing rib roast, it can be tricky to carve at the table. So this year I opted for a boneless rib roast. Its rich marbling would guarantee plenty of beefy flavor, and searing and slicing the roast would be much easier.

To prepare it, I called upon the tried and true test kitchen method for bone-in rib roast. I salted the roast a day in advance to ensure complete seasoning. I then roasted it in a 250-degree oven until it hit 120 degrees (for medium-rare) and set it aside for an hour before searing the exterior in a piping hot skillet. Next I made a quick sauce—a jus—with chopped onion, reduced beef broth, cornstarch for thickening, and a sprig of thyme. Even without the bones, this technique yielded a seasoned, crusty exterior enveloping a rosy, juicy interior.

While the roast was resting for an hour before its final sear, I set my sights on the slightly more complicated portion of my feast. Making a Yorkshire pudding—a savory pancake of milk (or water), flour, and eggs, similar to a Dutch baby or popover—can be a fraught process. It's all about texture. You want a custardy, moist interior with a contrasting crunchy exterior. The existing recipes I researched had a lot of folklore to wade through, often with "unbreakable" rules for success. I was skeptical.

The beauty of a boneless rib roast is easy carving. Serve the end cuts to guests who prefer their meat more well-done.

Almost all British chefs agree that you need to use a preheated pan and a hot oven in order to get a better rise in your pudding. And despite my skepticism, this claim held true. After experimenting, I found that pouring the batter into a hot pan (and I mean really hot—preheated at 425 degrees until the fat was beginning to smoke) not only caused the pudding to achieve a towering height but also kept it from sticking to the pan. This was excellent news, as it meant I could use the same pan I roasted my beef in and thus take full advantage of those flavorful drippings.

Only one problem: There weren't enough drippings for my Yorkshire pudding. For a full, roasting-pan-size Yorkshire pudding, I'd need 6 tablespoons of fat, and my boneless roast was yielding less than half that. So for my next test, I chopped up the trimmings I'd removed from the roast's fat cap and placed about ¾ cup of them in the roasting pan when the beef went in. This ensured that I'd have plenty of rendered fat for my pudding.

I was more doubtful about the existing recipes' call to stir together the batter and let it sit at room temperature before baking. Yet after a few tests, this rule, too, proved essential: I found that letting the batter sit at room temperature for 1 hour yielded a taller pudding. Why? Our science editor confirmed that the hour-long rest allowed time for the gluten formed when mixing the batter to relax, so the pudding was able to rise more quickly in the oven.

With a succulent roast, a deeply savory jus, and my golden, gloriously tall Yorkshire pudding, all I needed was one final traditional condiment. I chose a sharp, bracing, supersimple stir-together horseradish sauce.

I was now ready for the holiday feast—and even my friends in the United Kingdom would be happy.

BONELESS RIB ROAST WITH YORKSHIRE PUDDING AND JUS

Serves 8 to 10

At the butcher counter, ask for a roast with an untrimmed fat cap, ideally ½ inch thick, in order to get enough trimmings to cook the pudding. Plan ahead. The roast must be salted and refrigerated for at least 24 hours before cooking. The roast and Yorkshire pudding can also be made separately from one another. To make only the roast, do not add the trimmed fat to the roasting pan. To make only the Yorkshire pudding, proceed with step 6, substituting 6 tablespoons of vegetable oil for the beef fat. Our winning roasting pan is the Calphalon Contemporary Stainless Roasting Pan with Rack. If you're using a dark, nonstick roasting pan, reduce the cooking time for the Yorkshire pudding by 5 minutes. Serve with Horseradish Sauce (recipe follows), if desired.

ROAST AND PUDDING

- **1 (5- to 5½-pound) first-cut boneless beef rib roast with ½-inch fat cap**
- **Kosher salt and pepper**
- **2⅓ cups (12⅓ ounces) all-purpose flour**
- **4 cups milk**
- **4 large eggs**
- **1 tablespoon vegetable oil, plus extra as needed**

JUS

- **1 onion, chopped fine**
- **1 teaspoon cornstarch**
- **2½ cups beef broth**
- **1 sprig fresh thyme**

1. FOR THE ROAST AND PUDDING: Using sharp knife, trim roast's fat cap to even ¼ inch thickness and refrigerate trimmings for later use. Cut 1 inch crosshatch pattern in fat cap, being careful not to cut into meat. Rub 2 tablespoons salt over entire roast and into crosshatch. Transfer to large plate and refrigerate, uncovered, for at least 24 hours or up to 4 days.

2. Adjust oven rack to lower-middle position and heat oven to 250 degrees. Spray roasting pan with vegetable oil spray. Cut reserved trimmings into ½ inch pieces. Place 3 ounces (about ¾ cup) trimmings in bottom of prepared pan. Set V rack over trimmings in pan.

3. Season roast with pepper and place fat side up on V rack. Roast until meat registers 115 degrees for rare, 120 degrees for medium rare, or 125 degrees for medium, 2½ to 3 hours.

4. Meanwhile, combine flour and 1 tablespoon salt in large bowl. Whisk milk and eggs in second bowl until fully combined. Slowly whisk milk mixture into flour mixture until smooth. Cover with plastic wrap and let rest at room temperature for 1 hour. (Batter can be covered and refrigerated for up to 24 hours. Let come to room temperature before proceeding with recipe.)

5. Transfer V rack with roast to carving board, tent with aluminum foil, and let rest for 1 hour. Using fork, remove solids in pan, leaving liquid fat behind (there should be about 6 tablespoons; if not, supplement with extra vegetable oil). Increase oven temperature to 425 degrees.

6. When oven reaches 425 degrees, return pan to oven and heat until fat is just smoking, 3 to 5 minutes. Rewhisk batter and pour into center of pan. Bake until pudding is dark golden brown and edges are crisp, 40 to 45 minutes.

7. Meanwhile, pat roast dry with paper towels. Heat 1 tablespoon oil in 12 inch skillet over medium high heat until just smoking. Sear roast on all sides until evenly browned, 5 to 7 minutes. Transfer roast to carving board.

8. FOR THE JUS: Return skillet to medium high heat and add onion. Cook until onion is just softened, about 3 minutes, scraping up any browned bits. Whisk cornstarch into broth. Add broth mixture and thyme sprig to skillet and bring to boil. Reduce heat to medium low and simmer until reduced by half and slightly thickened, about 7 minutes. Strain jus through fine mesh strainer set over small saucepan; discard solids. Cover and keep warm.

9. Slice roast ¾ inch thick. Cut pudding into squares in roasting pan. Serve beef with Yorkshire pudding and jus.

HORSERADISH SAUCE

Makes about 1 cup

Buy refrigerated prepared horseradish, not the shelf-stable kind, which contains preservatives and additives.

- **½ cup sour cream**
- **½ cup prepared horseradish**
- **1½ teaspoons kosher salt**
- **⅛ teaspoon pepper**

Combine all ingredients in bowl. Cover and refrigerate for at least 30 minutes to allow flavors to meld. (Sauce can be refrigerated for up to 2 days.)

The Ups (and Downs) of Yorkshire Pudding

Letting the batter rest for 1 hour and preheating the roasting pan in a hot oven for 3 to 5 minutes will help the Yorkshire pudding puff up during baking, and this is a good thing. But don't be disappointed when the pudding deflates shortly after it comes out of the oven or as you're slicing and serving it. That's supposed to happen. The custardy interior will be no less delicious, and people will still ask for seconds.

▶ A good roasting pan makes all the difference here. Go to **CooksCountry.com/roastingpans** to learn more about our favorite.

TEST KITCHEN TECHNIQUE **Trimming and Prepping the Fat Cap**

Instead of scouring the meat case, we recommend asking the butcher directly for a first-cut boneless beef rib roast with an untrimmed fat cap, ideally ½ inch thick. You may have to call ahead and special-order this roast. Trust us: It's worth it.

1. TRIM
Using sharp knife, trim fat cap to even ¼-inch thickness. Refrigerate trimmings.

2. SCORE
Cut 1-inch crosshatch pattern into fat cap, being careful not to cut into meat.

3. RENDER
Place 3 ounces of reserved trimmings in roasting pan (rendered fat will be used for Yorkshire pudding).

Caesar Green Bean Salad

If Caesar dressing is good enough for lettuce, surely it's good enough for beans.

BY DIANE UNGER

IT'S HARD TO beat a classic Caesar salad: Bite-size pieces of torn Romaine lettuce leaves and crunchy croutons tossed in a salty, briny, sour, sweet, and savory dressing. For a twist, I wanted to take the things we love about Caesar salad and unleash them on a green bean salad that I could serve as a no-fuss holiday side.

I knew that I wanted the dressing to be thick enough to steadfastly cling to the green beans; to achieve this effect in the past, we've often turned to mayonnaise or mustard. Both condiments have proved useful in keeping dressings cohesive, so I made two dressings, employing mayonnaise in one and Dijon mustard in the other, along with lemon juice, Worcestershire sauce, garlic, and a few anchovies that I minced to a fine paste. I drizzled in 3 tablespoons of olive oil as I whisked, seasoned the mixture with pepper, and gathered my tasters for a side-by-side test. It was unanimous. We all preferred the lightly thickened emulsion created by the Dijon mustard.

For the green beans, most recipes I tried called for boiling them briefly before shocking them in ice water to stop the cooking (and help keep the beans bright green). While this method worked fine, the beans were a bit waterlogged. A colleague suggested boiling the green beans until tender, draining them, and transferring them directly to towels to dry, skipping the shocking step altogether. These beans had a deeper flavor, and any brightness I lost was minimal—and indiscernible once the beans were dressed. Plus, it was a lot easier than fussing with an ice bath.

A Caesar without croutons? Not on my watch. I took a nice crusty baguette and cut it up into ½-inch pieces (a 3-ounce piece of baguette gave me 3 cups of cubes). I tossed these with some olive oil and pepper (no salt, as I knew the dressing was highly seasoned) and toasted them in a skillet until they were golden brown and crispy all over, which took just 5 to 7 minutes.

I tossed the beans and croutons, along with an ounce of Parmesan cheese that I'd shaved with a vegetable peeler, with my dressing and transferred the lot to a holiday-worthy serving bowl. I topped it with more shaved Parmesan and gathered my crew. They loved this variation on the classic Caesar, and I loved how easy it was to put together.

CAESAR GREEN BEAN SALAD

Serves 4 to 6

For maximum crunch, use a good-quality baguette for the croutons. The dressing can be made up to 1 day in advance.

DRESSING AND GREEN BEANS

- 1½ tablespoons lemon juice
- 1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
- 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 3 anchovy fillets, minced to paste
- Salt and pepper
- 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1½ pounds green beans, trimmed
- 2 ounces Parmesan cheese, shaved with vegetable peeler

CROUTONS

- 3 ounces baguette, cut into ½-inch pieces
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- ¼ teaspoon pepper

1. FOR THE DRESSING AND GREEN BEANS: Whisk lemon juice, Worcestershire, mustard, garlic, anchovies, ½ teaspoon pepper, and ¼ teaspoon salt in bowl until combined. Slowly whisk in oil until emulsified; set aside.

2. Line baking sheet with clean dish towel. Bring 4 quarts water to boil in large Dutch oven. Add green beans and 1½ teaspoons salt, return to boil, and cook until tender, 5 to 7 minutes. Drain green beans in colander and spread in even layer on prepared sheet. Let green beans cool completely.

3. FOR THE CROUTONS: Meanwhile, toss baguette, oil, and pepper in large bowl until baguette pieces are coated with oil. Transfer to 12-inch nonstick skillet (reserve bowl). Cook over medium-high heat, stirring occasionally, until golden brown and crispy, 5 to 7 minutes. Return croutons to reserved bowl.

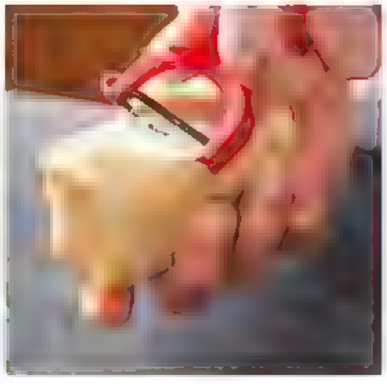
4. Transfer dressing, green beans, and half of Parmesan to bowl with croutons and toss to combine. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Transfer to serving dish. Sprinkle with remaining Parmesan. Serve.

A mix of Worcestershire sauce, anchovies, and Parmesan makes this salad extra-savory.

TEST KITCHEN TECHNIQUES

Draining Green Beans

Instead of shocking the green beans in ice water to stop the cooking, we simply drain them and spread them onto a dish towel–lined baking sheet to cool.



Shaving Parmesan Cheese

Run a vegetable peeler over a block of Parmesan cheese to make paper-thin shavings.

Lighthouse Inn Potatoes

Back at the inn, this rich holiday side was made with leftover potatoes. But for a dish this good, we didn't want to wait. BY ASHLEY MOORE

MY FAMILY HAS been making Lighthouse Inn Potatoes for parties and holiday dinners since I was a kid. Chunks of soft potatoes baked in a rich cream sauce and topped with golden bread crumbs—what's not to love?

The Lighthouse Inn was an iconic hotel and restaurant located in New London, a popular seaside town in southeastern Connecticut, for more than a century before it closed its doors in 2009. Executive chef Leon "Wally" Walden, who worked there for nearly 50 years before his 1992 death, was known for many of his dishes, but Lighthouse Inn Potatoes was perhaps his most beloved offering. After he died, the local newspaper, *The New London Day*, published his recipe in tribute.

The recipe that the newspaper published calls for leftover baked russet potatoes, so I followed suit, cutting up a few and baking them in a creamy sauce under a generous layer of butter soaked bread crumbs. It was everything I remembered—the potatoes were tender, the sauce was silky and rich, and the topping was salty, crunchy, and satisfying.

But I didn't want to lean on leftovers. I wanted to start and eat my potatoes on the same day. Should be easy enough, right? I'd just have to precook the potatoes briefly before proceeding with the original recipe.

So I hit the kitchen, where I cut potatoes into chunks, boiled them in water until they were tender, immediately stirred them into the cream sauce, and slid them into the oven to bake. No dice: The sauce was thin and watery—not the smooth, silky texture I was looking for—and the potatoes weren't quite as tender.

After a conversation with our science editor, I realized what was happening to those leftover potatoes when they were resting overnight and why it mattered to the sauce. Because the potatoes were baked whole and only then cut into chunks, they weren't losing any of their starch along the way. But when I cut potatoes up and cooked them in water for a same-day dish, much of that valuable starch was sloughing off and being rinsed away.

After a few experiments, I found that if I cooked the potatoes in a heavy cream mixture and then dumped everything—cream included—into the baking dish before sliding it into the oven, the starch stayed in the sauce and left it rich and velvety.

But my dish was also a bit greasy. In pursuit of a lighter sauce, I tinkered with the amount of butter and also tried out both light cream and half-and-half. Tasters overwhelmingly preferred light cream, which stayed stable in the oven; half-and-half tended to curdle. To ensure a smooth, creamy sauce, I added just ⅛ teaspoon of baking soda to the mix, this tried-and-true test kitchen trick helped neutralize the very small amount of acidic tannin that came off the potatoes (this acid can lead to a curdled appearance) and kept things stable and silky.

As I dug into my final batch of creamy, savory, satisfying Lighthouse Inn Potatoes, I felt certain that, even though I'd tinkered with his recipe, Chef Wally would be happy enough to call them his own.

LIGHTHOUSE INN POTATOES

Serves 8 to 10

We prefer the texture of light cream for this recipe, but heavy cream will also work. Do not use half-and-half; it has a tendency to break. Grate the Parmesan on a rasp-style grater. Our favorite panko bread crumbs are from Ian's.

- **2 ounces Parmesan cheese, grated (1 cup)**
- **1 cup panko bread crumbs**
- **4 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted, plus 6 tablespoons cut into 6 pieces**
- **Salt and pepper**
- **2½ pounds russet potatoes, peeled and cut into 1-inch chunks**
- **3 cups light cream**
- **⅛ teaspoon baking soda**

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 375 degrees. Combine Parmesan, panko, melted butter, and ¼ teaspoon salt in bowl; set aside.

2. Bring potatoes, 2½ cups cream, baking soda, 2 teaspoons salt, and 1 teaspoon pepper to boil in large saucepan over medium-high heat. Reduce heat to low and cook at bare simmer, stirring often, until paring knife slides easily into potatoes without them crumbling, 20 to 25 minutes.

Crunchy, buttery bread crumbs take this simple recipe right over the top

3. Off heat, stir remaining ½ cup cream and remaining 6 tablespoons butter into potato mixture until butter has melted, about 1 minute. Transfer potato mixture to 13 by 9 inch baking dish. Sprinkle Parmesan-panko mixture over top. Bake, uncovered, until bubbling around edges and surface is golden brown, 15 to 20 minutes. Let cool for at least 15 minutes. Serve.

TO MAKE AHEAD

After potato mixture has been transferred to baking dish, let cool completely, cover with aluminum foil, and refrigerate for up to 24 hours. Before applying topping, bake, covered, until heated through, about 35 minutes. Apply topping and continue to bake, uncovered, 15 to 20 minutes longer.

The Lighthouse Inn

Locals claim that the lighthouse inn, originally a country house for a wealthy businessman before being turned into a resort, is haunted.

Photo: Boston Public Library, Tichnor Brothers Collection

Soft and Chewy Gingerbread Cookies

Crisp gingerbread cookies can be great, but sometimes only soft and chewy will do.

BY KATIE LEAIRD

SLIDE A BATCH of gingerbread cookies into the oven and the aromas of cinnamon, nutmeg, and cloves swirl through the air Everyone can agree that they smell wonderful. But ask them whether they prefer thin and crisp or soft and chewy and people pick sides

I know this because I surveyed my fellow test cooks on a recent morning: Would you rather have a crisp cookie or a soft one? While many professed a pref erence for crisp cookies, soft and chewy cookies won the poll. A bit of research into the history of this holiday classic confirmed that this is no newfangled twist; fans of softer cookies have been around for generations.

Many of the gingerbread recipes I found had a low ratio of fat to flour, which made the dough easy to roll out and cut but meant that once baked, the cookies were too crunchy. I needed a dough that was firm enough to hold its shape in the oven (I wanted gingerbread people, not gingerbread amoebas) but that would stay soft and chewy after the cookies cooled, to get there, I'd need more fat. After a few tests, I arrived at 12 tablespoons of butter

While recipes often call for a stand mixer for creaming the butter into the other ingredients, I opted for an even quicker path: the food processor. What's more, rather than waiting for butter to soften, I simply melted the butter gently in the microwave and allowed it to cool for just 5 minutes before adding it to the processor with the other ingredients (including a balanced blend of ground cinnamon, ginger, and cloves). The dough came together in just seconds, and nothing was lost for the lack of a creaming step. I turned my dough out onto a lightly oiled counter for a quick knead before wrapping it and refrigerat ing it for an hour.

After rolling out dozens of doughs, I learned that rolling to a ¼ inch thickness was ideal for soft and chewy cookies every time. Using parchment paper kept the mess to a minimum I cut the cook ies out right away (no need for a second visit to the fridge) and baked them until they were just set around the edges and slightly puffed in the center. As they cooled, the slightly puffed cookies settled into a sublime chewiness

No gingerbread cookie should go undecorated, so I set to experimenting with decorative icing. Basic icing made from confectioners' sugar and milk was too runny to achieve clearly defined decorating lines. Instead, I whipped egg whites and sugar into a stiffer mixture. The result was a structured frosting that was easy to apply, with a beautiful bright white gloss.

My simple soft and chewy gingerbread cookies boasted the full package memory sparking aroma, satisfying flavor, and festive decoration.

One key to soft and chewy cookies is to roll the dough ¼ inch thick. Any thinner and you'll have crisp, brittle cookies.

TEST KITCHEN TIP

When Are They Done?

Even professional bakers have trouble deciding when cookies that start out brown should come out of the oven. Our solution is to carefully observe them during baking and remove them when they are puffy and just set around the edges.

SOFT AND CHEWY GINGERBREAD COOKIES

Makes about 24 cookies

Let the melted butter cool before adding it in step 1, or the dough will be too sticky to work with. Because we roll the dough between sheets of parchment paper (no additional flour is added), the scraps can be rerolled and cut as many times as necessary. The cookies can be stored in a wide, shallow airtight container with a sheet of parchment or waxed paper between each layer for up to 3 days. Plan ahead: The dough needs to rest for at least an hour before rolling.

- **3 cups (15 ounces) all-purpose flour**
- **¾ cup packed (5¼ ounces) dark brown sugar**
- **1 tablespoon ground cinnamon**
- **1 tablespoon ground ginger**
- **¾ teaspoon baking soda**
- **½ teaspoon ground cloves**
- **½ teaspoon salt**
- **12 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted and cooled**
- **¾ cup molasses**
- **2 tablespoons milk**

1. Process flour, sugar, cinnamon, ginger, baking soda, cloves, and salt in food processor until combined, about 10 seconds. Add melted butter, molasses, and milk and process until soft dough forms and no streaks of flour remain, about 20 seconds, scraping down sides of bowl as needed.

2. Spray counter lightly with baking spray with flour, transfer dough to counter, and knead until dough forms cohesive ball, about 20 seconds. Divide dough in half. Form each half into 5-inch disk, wrap disks tightly in plastic wrap, and refrigerate for at least 1 hour or up to 24 hours.

3. Adjust oven racks to upper-middle and lower-middle positions and heat oven to 350 degrees. Line 2 rimmed baking sheets with parchment paper. Working with 1 disk of dough at a time, roll dough between 2 large sheets of parchment to ¼-inch thickness. (Keep second disk of dough refrigerated while rolling out first.) Peel off top parchment sheet and use 3½-inch cookie cutter to cut out cookies. Peel away scraps from around cookies and space cookies ¾ inch apart on prepared sheets. Repeat rolling and cutting steps with dough scraps. (Depending on your cookie cutter dimensions, all cookies may not fit on sheets and second round of baking may be required. If so, let sheets cool completely before proceeding.)

4. Bake until cookies are puffy and just set around edges, 9 to 11 minutes, switching and rotating sheets halfway through baking. Let cookies cool on sheets for 10 minutes, then transfer to wire rack and let cool completely before decorating and serving.

The American Table
Whose Gingerbread?

Common food lore attributes a famous gingerbread recipe to Martha Washington, wife of the first U.S. president George Washington, but according to the Donald W. Reynolds Museum and Education Center at Mount Vernon, no such recipe exists. There is, however, evidence that Martha loved the stuff—a bill of sale for 49 pounds of gingerbread cake, sent initially to the estate of Martha's first husband Daniel Custis, was chivalrously paid by her second husband, George.

The mistake is easy to understand because a recipe for gingerbread cake from Mary Ball Washington (below), George's mother, does exist. Besides the ample presence of spices, including cloves, allspice, cinnamon, and ginger, the elder Mrs. Washington added orange juice and orange zest, uncommon (and uncommonly expensive) ingredients at the time.

DECORATING ICING **Makes 1⅓ cups**

This recipe makes bright white icing. For colored icing, stir 1 to 2 drops of food coloring into the icing to achieve the desired color before transferring it to a pastry bag.

- **2 large egg whites**
- **2⅔ cups (10⅔ ounces) confectioners' sugar**

1. Using stand mixer fitted with whisk attachment, whip egg whites and sugar on medium-low speed until combined, about 1 minute. Increase speed to medium-high and whip until glossy, soft peaks form, 2 to 3 minutes, scraping down bowl as needed.

2. Transfer icing to pastry bag fitted with small round pastry tip. Decorate cookies and let icing harden before serving.

Ground ginger gives our cookies subtle punch. Go to **CooksCountry.com/ginger** to read about our tasting of ground gingers.

Practice, practice . . . If you repeat similar designs, your results are likely to improve.

To get just the hue you're aiming for, mix food coloring into icing a little at a time.

TEST KITCHEN TIPS **Decorating with Confidence**

Decorating gingerbread cookies is easy—and fun—when you have a little know-how. Simple designs are often the most successful. After all, this type of cookie is a very small canvas.

Filling the Pastry Bag

Set a pastry bag fitted with a small round pastry tip in a liquid measuring cup or tall pint glass. Fold the bag over about halfway down into a cuff. Using a rubber spatula, load the frosting into the bag, packing tightly to eliminate air spaces. Twist tightly while again pushing on the frosting to squeeze out air.

No Pastry Bag? Don't Let It Stop You

If you don't own a pastry bag, a zipper-lock bag makes a great stand-in. Load the bag with frosting, pushing it into one corner of the bag, and then make a very small snip in the corner (you can always make the cut larger if necessary).

Let 'em Cool

Frosting will liquefy if it's piped onto hot cookies. Let the gingerbread cookies cool completely on a wire rack before you start decorating them.

Hold the Bag Like a Pro, and Do a Test Run

Once your icing is loaded into the pastry bag, grab the bag at the base of the twist with one hand. Using your other hand as a guide, hold the tip at a 90-degree angle about ½ inch above the cookie and gently squeeze to decorate. Practice your design on a sheet of parchment paper—or on a sacrificial cookie—before you start decorating in earnest.

Illustration: Lauren Pettapiece. Archival image: Library of Congress Prints & Photographs Division, reproduction of painting by Robert Edge Pine © Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, reproduction number LC-USZC4-7247

Cooking Class Easy Pound Cake

When it comes to flavor and texture, dessert doesn't get more straightforward than pound cake. But the classic recipe is notoriously fussy to make. Our version isn't. BY CHRISTIE MORRISON

EASY POUND CAKE Serves 8

The test kitchen's preferred loaf pan measures 8½ by 4½ inches; if you use a 9 by 5-inch pan, start checking for doneness 5 minutes early. To dress up the cake try our Citrus Glaze (recipe follows)

- 1½ cups (6 ounces) cake flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1¼ cups (8¾ ounces) sugar
- 4 large eggs, room temperature
- 1½ teaspoons vanilla extract
- 16 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted and hot

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 350 degrees. Grease and flour 8½ by 4½ inch loaf pan. Whisk flour, baking powder, and salt together in bowl.

2. Process sugar, eggs, and vanilla in food processor until combined, about 10 seconds. With processor running, add melted butter in steady stream until incorporated. Pour mixture into large bowl.

3. Sift flour mixture over egg mixture in 3 additions, whisking to combine after each addition until few streaks of flour remain. Continue to whisk batter gently until almost no lumps remain.

4. Transfer batter to prepared pan and smooth top. Wipe any drops of batter off sides of pan and gently tap pan on counter to release air bubbles. Bake until toothpick inserted in center comes out with few moist crumbs attached, 50 minutes to 1 hour, rotating pan halfway through baking.

5. Let cake cool in pan on wire rack for 10 minutes. Run small knife around edge of cake to loosen, then flip cake out onto wire rack. Turn cake right side up and let cool completely, about 2 hours, before serving. (Cake can be wrapped in plastic wrap and stored at room temperature for up to 5 days. Wrapped cake can be placed in zipper lock bag and frozen for up to 1 month.)

EASY LEMON POUND CAKE

Add 2 tablespoons grated lemon zest and 2 teaspoons lemon juice to food processor with sugar, eggs, and vanilla.

CITRUS GLAZE Makes about ¼ cup

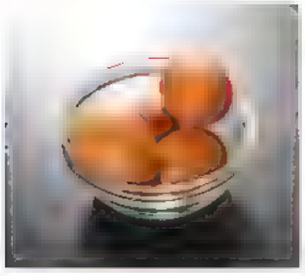
To apply, spread glaze over the top of the cooled cake, allowing some to drip down the sides. Let the glaze set for at least 15 minutes before serving. This recipe makes enough glaze for one pound cake.

- ½ cup confectioners' sugar, sifted
- 1 tablespoon lemon, lime, or orange juice

Whisk confectioners' sugar and citrus juice in bowl until smooth.

Go to **CooksCountry.com/Jan17** for our recipes for Easy Almond, Easy Ginger, and Easy Orange Pound Cakes.

STEP BY STEP Easy Pound Cake



1. USE ROOM-TEMPERATURE EGGS

Let the eggs slowly come to room temperature, or put them in warm tap water for 5 minutes.

WHY? Room-temperature eggs whip into a loftier foam than cold eggs; aerated eggs help the cake rise.

2. GREASE AND FLOUR PAN

Coat 8½ by 4½-inch loaf pan with vegetable oil spray. Dust pan with several tablespoons of flour. Dump out excess flour.

WHY? A dusting of flour helps the pound cake climb the sides of the pan and prevents the edges from forming a hard, crusty lip.

3. ADD BAKING POWDER

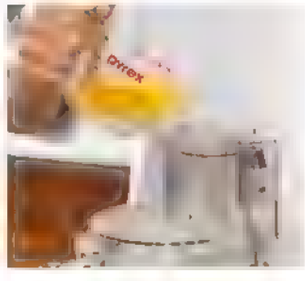
Whisk 1 teaspoon baking powder with cake flour and salt in bowl.

WHY? Traditional pound cakes rely on beaten eggs alone for leavening. Adding a small amount of baking powder is extra insurance for a proper domed rise.

4. START BATTER IN FOOD PROCESSOR

Process sugar, eggs, and vanilla extract until combined, about 10 seconds.

WHY? The food processor ensures that the ingredients are thoroughly combined before the butter is incorporated.



5. ADD HOT MELTED BUTTER

With food processor running, pour butter through feed tube in steady stream until incorporated.

WHY? The temperature of hot melted butter and the processor's fast-moving blade emulsify the liquid ingredients more quickly and completely than a mixer.

TEST KITCHEN TIPS FOR ANY POUND CAKE

How We Made It Easier

Most pound cake recipes require ingredients at precise temperatures and a finicky mixing method. Why? For a proper pound cake, the butter and eggs need to form a smooth emulsion that can then be aerated. If the butter or the eggs are too cold, the two never fully emulsify, and you end up with a curdled batter and a dense, heavy cake.

Our foolproof recipe calls for:

- a food processor (not a mixer) to create an ultrasmooth, aerated emulsion
- using hot melted butter (instead of room-temperature butter) for quick emulsification
- adding baking powder (instead of relying solely on beaten eggs) for lift

Pan Size Matters

The two most common sizes of loaf pan are 8½ by 4½ inches and 9 by 5 inches. In the test kitchen, we use an 8½ by 4½-inch pan, and our pound cake emerges with a distinct dome. A 9 by 5-inch pan will produce a cake with a flatter top but an equally moist, tender, and flavorful interior.

FLAT TOP
If your loaf pan measures 9 by 5 inches, test for doneness about 5 minutes early.

Working with Flour and Eggs

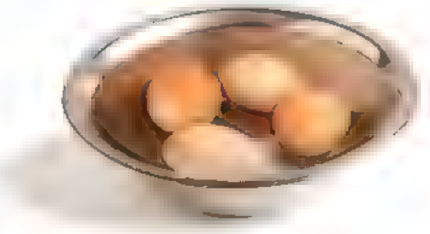
Cake Flour versus All-Purpose Flour

Cake flour has a lower protein level (6 to 8 percent) than all-purpose flour (9 to 12 percent protein). Not all cakes require cake flour, and we call for it in only a few recipes where we feel it delivers decidedly better results than all-purpose flour. One such recipe is our Easy Pound Cake, where we prefer the fine, tender crumb that only cake flour can produce. In a pinch, replace the cake flour with 1⅓ cups of all-purpose flour mixed with 3 tablespoons of cornstarch.

1½ CUPS CAKE FLOUR = 1⅓ CUPS ALL-PURPOSE FLOUR + 3 TABLESPOONS CORNSTARCH

Baking with Cold versus Room-Temperature Eggs

Cake recipes often call for room-temperature eggs, which whip higher and give more lift than cold eggs. But is the difference between room-temperature and cold eggs so great that it could actually ruin a pound cake? To find out, we made pound cakes with both room-temperature and cold eggs. Cold eggs didn't whip as well as room-temperature eggs, so the batter didn't rise properly, making the cake dense (the same held true for angel food and chiffon cakes). That said, we found that it's fine to use cold eggs in basic cake recipes that don't rely heavily on beaten eggs for lift.



SPEED IT UP
A 5-minute warm-water soak quickly brings eggs to room temperature.

The American Table
The Pound Cake Workout

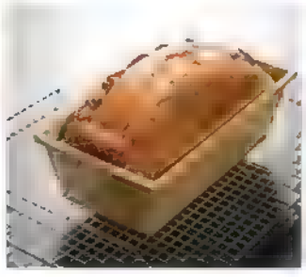
In 16th-century England, sweet cakes enriched with eggs and/or butter were popular. These incredibly large, special-occasion affairs called for upwards of 20 pounds of ingredients leavened with yeast.

Over time, the dessert evolved into the aptly named pound cake, calling for just a pound each of butter, sugar, flour, and eggs. Yeast was no longer on the ingredient list; the cake was leavened solely by eggs and air (no chemical leaveners, either). Before the advent of the stand mixer, that meant so much mixing by hand that it's a wonder anyone ever attempted to make it. To wit: The earliest known published recipe for pound cake (in the 1747 cookbook *The Art of Cookery Made Plain and Easy* by Hannah Glasse) calls for beating the batter for an astounding full hour, all by hand.

6. SIFT IN DRY INGREDIENTS
Sift flour mixture over egg mixture in 3 additions. After each addition, whisk to combine.
WHY? Because overmixing will lead to a heavy, dense cake, sift the dry ingredients to aerate and break the ingredients into small particles that will mix in easily.

7. TAP PAN ON COUNTER
Transfer batter to prepared pan and smooth top. Tap pan on counter to release air bubbles.
WHY? Tapping the loaf pan releases large air bubbles from the batter that could cause tunneling (large holes) in the crumb of the finished cake.

8. ROTATE CAKE HALFWAY THROUGH BAKING
Bake until toothpick inserted in center comes out with few moist crumbs attached, rotating pan halfway through baking.
WHY? Rotating the cake as it bakes ensures even heating even if your oven has hot spots.



9. LET COOL BRIEFLY IN PAN
Let cake cool in pan on wire rack for 10 minutes.
WHY? Letting the cake cool briefly in the pan allows it to firm up a little so it won't break apart when you remove it from the pan. (If you let it cool completely in the pan, it will be hard to remove.)

10. REMOVE CAKE FROM PAN AND LET COOL COMPLETELY
Run knife around edge, then flip cake onto rack. Turn cake right side up and let cool completely.
WHY? As the cake cools, the starches dry and firm up, making the cake easier to slice without tearing or crumbling.

Illustration: Jay Layman. Photo: MHS Research Center Photo Archives, Helena, MT

Five Easy Ricotta Crostini

We want party snacks that are as easy to make as they are to enjoy. BY ASHLEY MOORE

WHEN I THINK of parties, I think of sparkling conversation, refreshing cocktails, and savory little pass-around party snacks like crostini. These little toasts (*crostini* actually means "little toasts" in Italian) provide an excellent blank canvas for a range of toppings, from cheese to meat to vegetables. Ideas flooded my brain and I couldn't wait to get started.

I knew that each of these stacked bites would need to deliver major flavor but also be easy to eat one-handed. (I'm presuming, of course, that the other hand will be grasping a glass of something refreshing.) So they needed to be sturdy, and they needed something to help the toppings stick.

For the toasted bread platform, I chose a baguette. A thin slice of baguette is just the right size for finger food. I got the best results by brushing extra-virgin olive oil on one side of each slice of baguette and then baking the slices on a baking sheet until they were just crunchy enough.

For the sticky layer, I chose ricotta cheese. Its mild flavor would let the toppings shine, and its creamy texture is easy to work with and keeps toppings in place. Ricotta can sometimes be grainy, so I gave the cheese a quick whirl in the food processor with a little olive oil and some salt and pepper to smooth it out and thoroughly incorporate the seasonings.

For the toppings, I wanted to stick to bold pantry ingredients and fresh produce and herbs—no additional cooking required. I began with a simple, classic combination of tomatoes, basil, and garlic. For my first variation, I tossed together thinly sliced asparagus, peppery radishes, lemon juice, chives, and a bit of savory minced anchovy (trust me).

Next, I mixed chopped kalamata olives, sun-dried tomatoes, orange zest, and red wine vinegar and topped it all with crunchy chopped pine nuts. Thawed frozen peas with shallot, mint, and red wine vinegar made up the third variation. Finally, I swapped in sweet roasted peppers for the original tomatoes and combined them with minced capers, chopped parsley, and lemon zest.

Done. And with plenty of time left over to tidy up the kitchen and get ready for my guests.

RICOTTA CROSTINI WITH CHERRY TOMATOES AND BASIL

Makes 24 crostini

We prefer to use day-old bread for this recipe because it is easier to slice. The crostini are best topped shortly before serving. Our preferred whole-milk ricotta is BelGioioso Ricotta con Latte Whole Milk. A 12-inch demi-baguette will easily yield the 24 slices needed for this recipe.

- **24 (¼-inch-thick) slices baguette**
- **6 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil**
- **6 ounces cherry tomatoes, quartered**
- **1 small garlic clove, minced**
- **Salt and pepper**
- **6 ounces (¾ cup) whole-milk ricotta cheese**
- **¼ cup fresh basil leaves, torn**

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 400 degrees. Arrange baguette slices in single layer on rimmed baking sheet. Brush tops of slices with 2 tablespoons oil. Bake until golden brown and crispy, 8 to 10 minutes. Let cool completely on sheet, about 30 minutes.

2. Combine tomatoes, garlic, ¼ teaspoon salt, ¼ teaspoon pepper, and 2 tablespoons oil in bowl; set aside.

3. Process ricotta, ¼ teaspoon salt, and ¼ teaspoon pepper in food processor until smooth, about 10 seconds. With processor running, slowly add remaining 2 tablespoons oil until incorporated; transfer to bowl. Spread ricotta mixture evenly on toasted baguette slices. Spoon tomato mixture over ricotta and sprinkle with basil.

RICOTTA CROSTINI WITH ASPARAGUS AND RADISHES

Substitute 2 ounces asparagus, trimmed and sliced thin on bias, for tomatoes. Add 4 radishes, trimmed and sliced thin, ¼ cup minced fresh chives; 1 tablespoon lemon juice; and 1 minced anchovy fillet to asparagus mixture. Omit basil.

RICOTTA CROSTINI WITH OLIVES AND SUN-DRIED TOMATOES

Substitute ¾ cup pitted kalamata olives, chopped coarse, for tomatoes and ¼ cup toasted pine nuts, chopped, for basil. Add ½ cup oil-packed sun-dried tomatoes, patted dry and chopped coarse, and 1 teaspoon red wine vinegar to olive mixture. Process ½ teaspoon grated orange zest with ricotta mixture.

Don't overload your crostini: The last thing you want to do is spill on your party outfit.

RICOTTA CROSTINI WITH PEAS AND MINT

Substitute 1 cup thawed frozen peas for tomatoes, 1 minced small shallot for garlic, and torn fresh mint leaves for basil. Add 2 teaspoons red wine vinegar to pea mixture.

RICOTTA CROSTINI WITH ROASTED RED PEPPERS AND CAPERS

Substitute 1 cup jarred roasted red peppers, patted dry and chopped fine, for tomatoes. Reduce salt to ⅛ teaspoon and add ¼ cup chopped fresh parsley and 2 tablespoons capers, rinsed and minced, to red pepper mixture. Process ½ teaspoon grated lemon zest with ricotta mixture. Omit basil.

INGREDIENT SPOTLIGHT

Ricotta

Our winning ricotta—**BelGioioso Ricotta con Latte Whole Milk**—boasts a rich, dense consistency, in part because of the manufacturer's packaging method, which gently transfers the cheese to containers. Its slightly sweet flavor is ideal for crostini.

Slow Cooker Classic Butternut Squash Soup

Our aim: A simple squash soup that tastes deeply of (wait for it) squash. BY DIANE UNGER

BUTTERNUT SQUASH SOUP should be silky smooth, deeply flavorful, and completely comforting. It should be light enough to serve in cups as an appetizer for a holiday dinner but substantial enough to serve in big bowls alongside hunks of crusty bread and a fresh salad for a modest weeknight supper.

But so many recipes cover up the earthy, slightly sweet flavor of the squash. Cooks add extras like sweet potatoes, leeks, potatoes, apple butter, or cider to the mix, and while many of them turn out a reasonable soup (we tried), the squash flavor seems to be an afterthought.

I wanted a soup that kept the focus on the squash, with room for garnishes to round things out. I wanted to make it in the slow cooker. And I wanted to make enough to have for supper tonight with plenty of leftovers to freeze and eat later in the week. A heady suite of challenges, but I was eager to take them on.

The first step is the toughest: peeling and cutting up a 3½-pound butternut squash. I used a vegetable peeler to remove that tough skin, halved the squash lengthwise, discarded the seeds, and cut the flesh into rough 1-inch pieces. This gave me about 9 cups of cut squash.

To build an aromatic base of flavor, I started with chopped onion. I zapped it in the microwave with butter until it softened (about 5 minutes) and then dropped it into the slow cooker. Next I tossed my squash chunks into the cooker, too, followed by 6 cups of water. I covered the cooker and let the soup cook on low for about 6 hours, until the squash was tender when I pierced it with a paring knife; I then pureed it right in the slow cooker using my immersion blender.

I had high hopes, but I soon found out that I'd sacrificed flavor by using water rather than a more flavorful liquid, like stock. What's more, the soup was thin and watery, not luxurious and creamy.

For my next experiment, I substituted flavorful chicken stock for the water. I also peeled, cored, and chopped a Golden Delicious apple to microwave with the onion. I added this to the slow cooker with the other ingredients and set it to cook. I also made another batch of the previous underwhelming soup (made with just water and no apple) for comparison.

Pepitas (roasted pumpkin seeds) add crunch, chives add freshness, and sour cream adds tang.

I set out both soups for my tasters. No contest: They strongly preferred the soup with the chicken stock and apple. This soup had a more complex and slightly brighter flavor (without tasting strongly of apple), and the pectin from the apple gave the soup a slightly thicker texture, leaving it velvety and smooth.

Smooth soups are often finished with heavy cream, and I put that to the test in a four-way match up: four soups with varying amounts of cream (1 cup, ½ cup, ¼ cup, and no cream at all) stirred in. Surprisingly, tasters nixed the cream completely in favor of the clean flavor and vibrant orange color of the unadulterated butternut.

For a final touch, I set out a range of garnishes for tasters to choose from. The most popular combination was sour cream, toasted pepitas, and chives, but simple buttery croutons, crumbled goat cheese or blue cheese, and minced fresh herbs (sage, parsley, and tarragon) also proved popular. Luckily, I had plenty of leftover soup with which to try them all.

Same Soup, New Flavor

Give leftovers a twist by topping them with inventive garnishes:

- crumbled blue cheese, toasted croutons, and crispy bits of bacon
- toasted sage leaves and drizzles of thinned sour cream
- dots of goat cheese and minced fresh parsley or tarragon

SLOW-COOKER CLASSIC BUTTERNUT SQUASH SOUP

Serves 8

We prefer the flavor of whole squash for this recipe, but prepeeled and cut squash, available at some grocery stores, will also work. Our winning chicken broth is Swanson Chicken Stock.

- 1 onion, chopped
- 1 Golden Delicious apple, peeled, cored, and chopped
- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into 4 pieces
- Salt and pepper
- 3½ pounds butternut squash, peeled, seeded, and cut into 1-inch pieces (9 cups)
- 6 cups chicken broth
- Sour cream
- Roasted, salted pepitas
- Minced fresh chives

1. Combine onion, apple, butter, and 1 teaspoon salt in bowl and microwave, covered, until onion has softened, about 5 minutes. Transfer mixture to slow cooker and stir in squash and broth. Cover and cook until squash is tender, 6 to 8 hours on low or 4 to 6 hours on high.

2A. FOR A BLENDER: Working in batches, process soup in blender until smooth, 1 to 2 minutes. Transfer soup to Dutch oven. Rewarm over medium-low heat, about 2 minutes. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

2B. FOR AN IMMERSION BLENDER: Submerge blender in slow cooker and process soup until smooth, about 3 minutes. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

3. Serve soup, garnished with sour cream, pepitas, and chives.

Storing and Reheating Leftovers

The soup can be refrigerated in an airtight container for up to three days or frozen for up to two months. When you're ready to eat it, simply transfer the refrigerated soup to a saucepan and warm it over medium-low heat. A frozen portion of soup can be microwaved at 30 percent power to defrost it and then heated at full power until it's hot.

One-Pan Dinner Mediterranean Shrimp

The goal: a fresh, healthful weeknight supper without a sink full of pots and pans.

BY KATIE LEAR D

IT'S COMMON TO see shrimp skewered on the grill, sizzling in butter in a hot skillet, or frying in a pool of hot oil in a Dutch oven. But an alternate option, a one-baking-sheet meal with shrimp as the centerpiece, calls for the oven.

The beauty of using shrimp for a speedy supper is that they cook through quickly when exposed to any sort of heat. And unlike other proteins that need direct contact with a hot surface or flame to achieve an appetizing sear, shrimp taste great without it.

But this is also the danger of shrimp—it's far too easy to overcook them. If they spend too long in the oven, their delicate flesh turns tough and rubbery. After a few initial tests, I discovered that 6 to 8 minutes in a 450-degree oven was perfect.

Finding vegetables that shared this short cooking time was a futile exercise—almost nothing I tried would cook through in that time frame. I knew I'd have to give the vegetables a good head start in the oven and then add the shrimp for just the final few minutes. Potatoes were easy enough to incorporate using this method. But what about something green?

I tried broccolini, an underused vegetable that I love, but it turned into an unappealing swampy mess on the baking sheet. Spinach just turned slimy. My breakthrough came when a coworker suggested I try fennel.

Though its pale color made it appear less vibrant than other green vegetables, the slightly sweet, licorice-like flavor of roasted fennel paired beautifully with the briny shrimp. By slicing the fennel bulb into wedges through the stem end, I was able to keep the layers intact as they cooked, plus, this thick cut provided more surface area for flavorful browning.

To liven things up and give the dish a Mediterranean flavor profile, I tossed the shrimp with oregano and lemon zest before adding them to the pan with crumbled feta and sliding it back into the oven. When the shrimp were cooked through, I scattered a handful of chopped kalamata olives over the top. A sprinkling of parsley and a squeeze of lemon put the final fresh touches on this satisfying, Mediterranean-style shrimp supper.

A spritz of juice from a lemon wedge lifts this light weeknight supper.

Roast Veggies First

Roast the longer-cooking potatoes and fennel until they are just tender. Then, flip the vegetables so their browned sides are facing up and scatter the oregano-and-lemon-scented shrimp and the feta on top to cook the shrimp. Sprinkle with parsley and kalamata olives before serving.

ONE-PAN MEDITERRANEAN SHRIMP

Serves 4 to 6

We prefer all-natural shrimp that aren't treated with sodium or preservatives. If buying frozen shrimp, the ingredient label should list only "shrimp."

- 1½ pounds Yukon Gold potatoes, peeled and sliced ½ inch thick
- 2 fennel bulbs, stalks discarded, bulbs halved lengthwise and cut into 1-inch-thick wedges through stem end
- 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, plus extra for drizzling
- Salt and pepper
- 2 pounds jumbo shrimp (16 to 20 per pound), peeled, deveined, and tails removed
- 2 teaspoons dried oregano
- 1 teaspoon grated lemon zest, plus lemon wedges for serving
- 4 ounces feta cheese, crumbled (1 cup)
- ½ cup pitted kalamata olives, halved
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley

1. Adjust oven rack to lower-middle position and heat oven to 450 degrees. Toss potatoes, fennel, 2 tablespoons oil, 1 teaspoon salt, and ¼ teaspoon pepper together in bowl. Spread vegetables in single layer on rimmed baking sheet and roast until just tender, about 25 minutes.

2. Pat shrimp dry with paper towels. Toss shrimp, oregano, lemon zest, remaining 1 tablespoon oil, ½ teaspoon salt, and ¼ teaspoon pepper together in bowl.

3. Using spatula, flip potatoes and fennel so browned sides are facing up. Scatter shrimp and feta over top. Return to oven and roast until shrimp are cooked through, 6 to 8 minutes. Sprinkle olives and parsley over top and drizzle with extra oil. Serve with lemon wedges.

INGREDIENT SPOTLIGHT **Feta**

Rich, tangy, and salty feta cheese never fully melts, maintaining some of its crumbly texture during baking. Our favorite—**Mt. Vikos Traditional Feta**—has a "funky" flavor and a "creamy, crumbly" consistency.

Cooking for Two Chicken Cacciatore

Syncing the sauce and the chicken made all the difference for this rustic supper.

BY CECELIA JENKINS

CACCIATORE, WHICH MEANS "hunter-style" in Italian, refers to a rustic dish of freshly caught game (usually rabbit), foraged mushrooms, and rosemary that's traditionally served after a hunt. It's since become a ubiquitous Italian American dish, with bone-in chicken substituting for rabbit and chunky tomatoes and peppers added to the saucy braise.

My biggest challenge was avoiding dry chicken and a too-thick or too-thin sauce. To leap over these hurdles, I had to find a way to sync the cooking of the chicken and the sauce so that everything finished at the same time. Nixing chicken breasts in favor of leg quarters fit the bill; dark meat stays moist in long braises, so the window of time for cooking them could be a bit more flexible than with white meat. Additionally, they cut a rustic figure in keeping with the style of the dish—not to mention that they're cheap.

After searing and setting aside the chicken legs, I sautéed cremini mushrooms, bell peppers, and onions in the same skillet. (Tasters greatly preferred the sweetness and brightness of red bell peppers to green.) Adding the tomato paste next gave it a chance to caramelize and develop complexity; garlic, rosemary, and pepper flakes contributed yet more flavor. Now for some liquid. I wanted something to balance the sweet tomatoes and peppers, and red wine was too heavy and earthy. Sharp, lighter white wine gave just enough acidity while broth added savoriness and diced tomatoes contributed a chunky texture. Scraping up the brown bits on the bottom of the pan ensured deep flavor.

I experimented with finishing the dish uncovered on the stovetop and in the oven. Both failed: The sauce from the stovetop sample, cooked over low heat, was overly thick and ketchup-like by the time the chicken was done, while the sauce from the oven resembled soup. I tried a hybrid method, covering my skillet on the stovetop until the chicken cooked through and then removing the lid for the last few minutes to let the sauce reduce. It worked beautifully—and since I was using forgiving leg quarters, I could leave them in the pan, as that extra time wouldn't affect their juiciness. With a sprinkling of fresh basil, I had chicken cacciatore for two in just an hour, no hunting required.

A few red pepper flakes lend a touch of heat to this dish; feel free to add more at the table.

CHICKEN CACCIATORE FOR TWO

Some leg quarters are sold with the backbone attached. Be sure to remove it before cooking to make serving easier. If serving with pasta, adjust sauce consistency with reserved pasta cooking water as needed.

- 2 (10-ounce) chicken leg quarters, trimmed
- Salt and pepper
- 2 teaspoons vegetable oil
- 6 ounces cremini mushrooms, trimmed and quartered
- 1 small onion, chopped
- ½ cup chopped red bell pepper
- 1 tablespoon tomato paste
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1½ teaspoons minced fresh rosemary
- ⅛ teaspoon red pepper flakes
- ¼ cup white wine
- 1 (14.5-ounce) can diced tomatoes
- ½ cup chicken broth
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh basil

1. Pat chicken dry with paper towels and season with salt and pepper. Heat oil in 10-inch skillet over medium-high heat until just smoking. Add chicken and cook until browned, about 5 minutes per side. Transfer to plate, skin side up.

2. Pour off all but 1 tablespoon fat from skillet; heat fat over medium heat until shimmering. Add mushrooms, onion, bell pepper, ⅛ teaspoon salt, and ¼ teaspoon pepper and cook, uncovered, stirring occasionally, until vegetables are softened and browned, 8 to 10 minutes.

3. Stir in tomato paste, garlic, rosemary, and pepper flakes and cook until mixture is rust colored and fragrant, stirring frequently, about 2 minutes. Stir in wine and any accumulated chicken juices, scraping up any browned bits, and cook until liquid is evaporated, about 1 minute. Add tomatoes and their juice and broth and bring to boil.

4. Nestle chicken into sauce, skin side up. Reduce heat to medium-low, cover, and simmer until chicken registers 175 degrees, 22 to 25 minutes. Remove lid, increase heat to medium-high, and continue to cook until sauce is slightly thickened, about 5 minutes longer. Sprinkle with basil. Serve.

The American Table
Rabbit, Rabbit

In Italy, *cacciatore* recipes are made with rabbit as often as they're made with chicken. But in the United States? Not so much. Americans eat much less rabbit than Europeans, but during the colonial era, farmers and rural settlers frequently hunted and ate rabbits, which were plentiful.

Recipes abounded in the 1796 book *American Cookery*, Amelia Simmons (the title page lists her as "An American Orphan") wrote "The cultivation of Rabbits would be profitable in America." Some farmers tried. But cultivation never really took off.

Some say that rabbit meat remained unpopular due to cuteness—bunnies are fluffy and adorable, after all. Others suspect a pall of shame; like squirrels and other woodland critters, rural folks often turned to rabbit meat in tough times, and for many, rabbit meat never escaped the association with poverty.

TEST KITCHEN TECHNIQUE
Prepping Leg Quarters

Cut off any large pockets of fat and then trim any skin that hangs off the leg quarter. If the backbone is still attached, cut through to remove it, along with any attached skin.

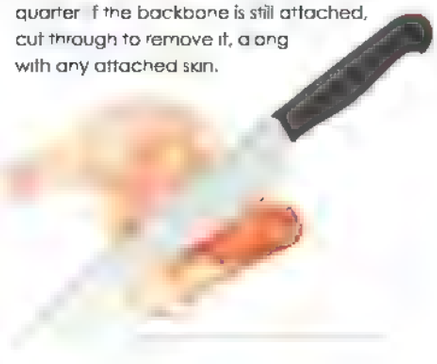


Illustration: Lauren Pettapiece; Photo: Russell Lee/Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA/OWI Collection, LC-USF34-034428-D [P&P]

Equipment Review Inexpensive Dutch Ovens

Our favorite Dutch oven costs $360. We needed a practical alternative. BY HANNAH CROWLEY

KEY Good ★★★ Fair ★★ Poor ★

THE TEST KITCHEN GAUNTLET

7 Dutch Ovens, 8 Tests

We put each Dutch oven through the following battery of tests:

1. Time how long it takes to boil water
2. Cook one batch of White Rice
3. Fry 15 ounces of frozen French fries in 2 quarts of oil
4. Braise one batch of Beef Burgundy
5. Bake one loaf of Almost No-Knead Bread
6. Wash (five times) with abrasive sponge
7. Whack rim with metal spoon 50 times
8. Slam lid down onto its base 10 times

A DUTCH OVEN just might be the most versatile pot you can own. It can go on the stove and in the oven, which makes it ideal for braising meat; cooking soups, stews, and sauces; boiling water; frying, and even baking bread.

These pots come in all shapes, sizes, and materials. Over years of testing and using them daily in the test kitchen, we've determined that we like round Dutch ovens (oval ones hang off of burners) that hold a minimum of 6 quarts. And we like heavy pots made of enameled cast iron, which conducts and retains heat well and is easy to clean.

Our favorite, the Le Creuset 7¼ Round Dutch Oven, performs magnificently and, with proper care, should last a lifetime—but it costs $359.99. So we decided to try to find a great Dutch oven for a lot less money, setting a price cap of around $125.00. We chose seven challengers priced from $24.29 to $121.94 and put each one through a grueling battery of tests.

After weeks of rigorous testing, it was clear that all the pots can cook food acceptably, but we found three Dutch ovens we truly liked.

To read the full testing results, go to CooksCountry.com/Jan17

What traits mattered? First, material. We included two light aluminum pots in our lineup because we've heard complaints about how heavy enameled cast iron Dutch ovens are. But cooking with these two light pots only reinforced our preference for those with cast iron cores, as the aluminum pots were prone to scorching and dented easily.

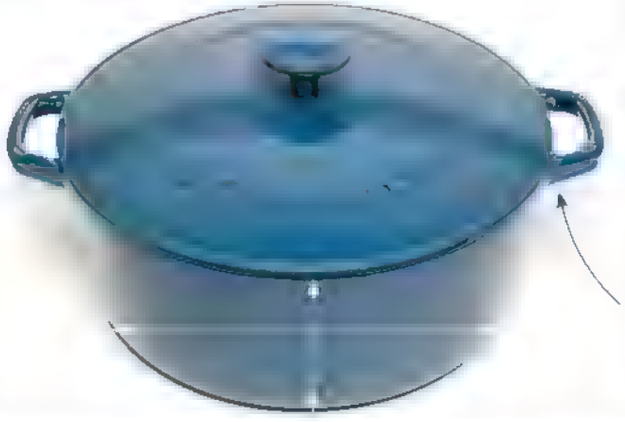
Big, comfortable handles were a must for these heavy pots, and those with skimpy handles were downgraded accordingly. The interior color of the pots mattered, too. All of the cast iron pots, save one, had a light interior that made it easy to monitor browning. The outlier had a dark nonstick finish that made it easy to clean but hard to see if the food was browning. Our testing also bore out a preference for pots with shorter sides, as tall sides made it more awkward to add food to hot oil in a safe, splash-free manner when frying.

But what really made some pots easier to use was their shape. Broad bases with straight sides were best. Two pots had rounded sides that curved in at the base, reducing some of their potential flat usable cooking surface. Larger cooking surfaces fit more food, so we could brown beef for stew in two batches versus three or four, a savings of up to 15 minutes. Aside from the time savings, prolonged browning can mean that the fond (the flavorful brown bits that form on the bottom on the pot) is more likely to burn, which can render your dinner inedible.

The Cuisinart 7 Qt. Round Covered Casserole performed like a champ in all of our cooking tests, and it costs just $121.94. It has the same advantageous shape and features as the Le Creuset—broad with straight, low sides, big comfortable handles, and a core made of cast iron. The trade-off? It's 3 pounds heavier than the Le Creuset, and it chipped cosmetically along its rim during our abuse testing. But it's a great pot and a great value.

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

CUISINART 7 Qt. Round Covered Casserole



Model: CU-C670-30CR **Price:** $121.94
Material: Enameled cast iron **Capacity:** 7 qt.
Weight: 16.8 lb **Usable Cooking Surface Diameter:** 10 in.

This model costs a third of what our favorite Le Creuset Dutch oven does and performed almost as well. With a very similar design—low, straight sides and a broad, off-white cooking surface—it allowed us to easily move food, sear in fewer batches, and monitor browning. The trade-offs: The Cuisinart pot is 3 pounds heavier and has slightly smaller handles than the Le Creuset pot, and its rim chipped during abuse testing.

WINNING TRAITS

- Enameled cast iron construction
- Heats evenly and retains heat well
- **Easy-to-grip, comfortable handles**
- **Broad, squat shape**
- Heavy, but not too heavy
- Light-colored interior
- At least 6-quart capacity

Cooking	★★★
Capacity	★★★
Ease of Use	★★½
Durability	★★½

RECOMMENDED

CRITERIA

COOKING WITH CALPHALON
Enamel Cast Iron Red 7-Qt. Dutch Oven with Cover
Model: 1835758 **Price:** $111.30
Material: Enameled cast iron
Capacity: 7 qt. **Weight:** 15.45 lb
Usable Cooking Surface Diameter: 9.5 in.

Cooking	★★½
Capacity	★★★
Ease of Use	★★½
Durability	★★½

LODGE ENAMEL
7.5 Quart Dutch Oven
Model: EC7D43 **Price:** $84.99
Material: Enameled cast iron
Capacity: 7.5 qt. **Weight:** 18.15 lb
Usable Cooking Surface Diameter: 8.5 in.

Cooking	★★★
Capacity	★★
Ease of Use	★★
Durability	★★½

RECOMMENDED WITH RESERVATIONS

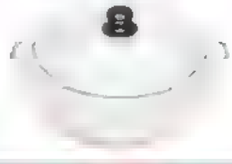
TRAMONTINA
6.5 Qt. Round Cast Iron Dutch Oven
Model: 80131/076DS **Price:** $69.96
Material: Enameled cast iron
Capacity: 6.5 qt. **Weight:** 13.45 lb
Usable Cooking Surface Diameter: 8.4 in.

Cooking	★★★
Capacity	★★½
Ease of Use	★
Durability	★★½

LODGE ENAMEL
6 Quart Dutch Oven
Model: EC6D38 **Price:** $60.99
Material: Enameled cast iron
Capacity: 6 qt. **Weight:** 13.85 lb
Usable Cooking Surface Diameter: 7.5 in.

Cooking	★★★
Capacity	★★
Ease of Use	★
Durability	★★½

IMUSA
Cast Aluminum Caldero Dutch Oven with Natural Finish
Model: GAU-80506W **Price:** $24.29
Material: Cast aluminum
Capacity: 6.9 qt. **Weight:** 3.7 lb
Usable Cooking Surface Diameter: 8.5 in.



Cooking	★★½
Capacity	★★★
Ease of Use	★★
Durability	★

NOT RECOMMENDED

NORDIC WARE 6.5 Quart ProCast Traditions Dutch Oven
Model: 21624 **Price:** $60.00
Material: Cast aluminum
Capacity: 6.5 qt. **Weight:** 5.95 lb
Usable Cooking Surface Diameter: 8 in.

Cooking	★★½
Capacity	★★
Ease of Use	½
Durability	★

Cleaning a Stained Pot

Enameled Dutch ovens are prone to staining, and while we're not concerned with keeping our cookware pristine, staining can be problematic if the bottom of the pot darkens so much that we can't monitor browning. After testing various methods, we found that the best way to deep-clean a stained pot is to let it soak overnight in a solution of 1 part bleach to 3 parts water and then wash it thoroughly with soap and water.

A well-used pot before and after cleaning

Tips for Improved Longevity

Chipping is a common problem with enameled Dutch ovens, which makes sense since enamel is made from powdered glass. Le Creuset's enameled surface is very durable, but it's not completely impervious. Here are some tips for keeping your enamel intact:

1. Don't subject your pot to dramatic temperature changes, especially near moisture.
2. Don't clear food from utensils by whacking them on the pot's rim.
3. Don't scrape metal utensils—specifically, sharp ones—along the bottom.
4. Don't heat an empty pot; reserve high heat for boiling water or cooking dishes with plenty of liquid.

Taste Test Spiral-Sliced Ham

Spiral-sliced ham is an easy and elegant holiday centerpiece. But not all hams are created equal. BY JASON ALVAREZ

WHY DO SO many people serve ham for the holidays? A better question might be, why do people serve anything else? A salty-sweet spiral-sliced ham is precooked (just heat, glaze if you like, and serve), sliced for easy carving, and feeds a crowd. These hams are big, easy, and delicious. But with so many products on the market, which one should you buy?

To answer this, we selected seven widely available varieties of bone-in spiral-sliced ham (a mix of shank-end and butt-end cuts; we tasted whichever was easier to find) and asked 21 editors and cooks to taste each one. We began by tasting slices of plain, oven-heated ham; we moved on to ham sandwiches stacked with never-heated, refrigerator-chilled slices, using a different ham from each manufacturer for each tasting.

None of the hams were awful, but some were definitely better than others. The flavors of four of the seven products were a little out of whack, with a single flavor—smokiness, saltiness, or sweetness—overwhelming the others. The lower-ranked hams also had textural issues, with the meat tending to be dry, chewy, or spongy. Conversely, three hams impressed our tasters with juicy, tender textures and smoky, salty, and sweet notes that were pronounced but never overly dominant. The key was balance. The best hams had it, but it was in short supply in the lower-ranked contenders.

What gives some hams better texture and balance of flavors than others? The manufacturers we spoke with refused to divulge their processing methods, so we turned to industry experts for answers. The first thing these experts told us was that the flavor of a ham is primarily the result of processing (and not of the pig's breed or diet), which explains why manufacturers didn't want to share their secrets. We learned that all of these hams are wet-cured; the curing turns the meat the classic pink color, removes water (and thus concentrates flavor and texture), and seasons the ham. Spiral-sliced hams are typically wet-cured by immersion in (and/or injection with) a brine made with water, curing salts, and some form of sweetener. Brine recipes vary and obviously have an effect on the texture and harmony of flavors (or lack thereof) in the finished product.

To get the brine to permeate, the hams are "massaged" in a mechanical tumbler, a contraption resembling an industrial-scale dryer where, as the name suggests, hams roll and tumble for anywhere from 2 to 24 hours. Not only does this help distribute the brine throughout the meat, but it also batters the hams against the tumbler's walls, tenderizing the meat by physical force. The constant pressure applied during tumbling also forces water out. So the length and force of tumbling is another carefully controlled variable that contributes to the success of the finished product.

After brining, hams are cooked to a temperature between 155 and 170 degrees and then smoked, usually with hickory wood. Methods and timing vary here, too, according to experts. Some manufacturers smoke their hams for as few as 2 hours, while others approach 24 hours. Add cooking and smoking to the factors that can make or break a ham.

In the end, we thought that all the hams were acceptable, but we did find three hams that were superior. With so many variables in the production process, it was clear that these three hams came from manufacturers with very carefully calibrated processes. Our winner, Johnston County Spiral-Sliced Ham, was tender and juicy, with the perfect balance of smoke, salt, sweetness, and fat. These hams are sold in stores and online as half hams, roughly 7.5 pounds each, with an average price of $64.95 per ham.

RECOMMENDED		TASTERS' NOTES
JOHNSTON COUNTY Spiral-Sliced Smoked Ham **Price:** $64.95 **Salt:** 940 mg **Sugar:** 2 g **Availability:** In stores and online ($34.15 shipping fee)		Our winning ham scored highly for flavor and texture. Tasters noted its "nice smokiness" and said it had "just enough sweetness." This ham was "tender and moist" with the "classic ham flavor" our tasters wanted. "Awesome," said one.
BURGERS' SMOKEHOUSE Spiral-Sliced City Ham **Price:** $66.50 **Salt:** 870 mg **Sugar:** 0 g **Availability:** Online (free shipping)		This ham appealed to tasters who preferred "porky" hams with a "very smoky flavor" that was assertive but not over the top. This product was balanced, with a texture that was "moist" and "tender."
APPLEWOOD FARMS Spiral-Sliced Ham **Price:** $45.00 **Salt:** 910 mg **Sugar:** 2 g **Availability:** Online ($19.95 shipping fee)		The flavors in this mellow, "pleasantly hammy," crowd-pleasing ham were nicely balanced. This ham appealed to those who preferred flavors more mellow than the bold "smoky sweetness" of the top two products.
RECOMMENDED WITH RESERVATIONS		
COOK'S Spiral-Sliced Hickory Smoked Ham **Price:** $24.40 **Salt:** 800 mg **Sugar:** 4 g **Availability:** In stores		This one nailed that "classic" spiral-sliced ham flavor. Tasters were impressed by its combination of "smoky-sweet" and "hammy, meaty" flavors. But it was downgraded slightly for a texture described as a bit "spongy."
CARANDO Hickory Smoked Spiral-Sliced Ham **Price:** $24.50 **Salt:** 760 mg **Sugar:** 2 g **Availability:** In stores		Tasters liked the "distinctly porky" and "mildly sweet and smoky" flavor of this ham. But their enthusiasm was tempered by a slightly "dry" and "chewy" texture.
HONEYBAKED HAM **Price:** $75.95 **Salt:** 1,230 mg **Sugar:** 4 g **Availability:** In stores and online ($9.95 to $39.95 shipping fee; varies by delivery day)		The original spiral-sliced ham, HoneyBaked strongly divided our tasters. Some found its sweet "honey" and "maple" flavors "delicious." Others found it "oddly sweet," verging on "candied," and overly salty (it has the most salt of any ham we tasted).
HICKORY FARMS Spiral-Sliced HoneyGold Ham **Price:** $75.00 **Salt:** 750 mg **Sugar:** 4 g **Availability:** Online ($0.00 shipping fee)		Tasters enjoyed this ham's "smoky," "meaty" flavor and "firm," "hearty" texture in sandwiches but found it "tough" and "leathery" when eaten plain. More than one taster noticed a faint "burnt" flavor.

Prices may be higher during holiday seasons. All nutritional information is per 3-ounce serving.

Heirloom Recipe

We're looking for recipes that have been handed down in your family for a generation or more and have earned a place in your heart. Visit **CooksCountry.com/recipesubmission** (or write to Heirloom Recipes, *Cook's Country*, P.O. Box 470739, Brookline, MA 02447) and tell us a little about the recipe. Include your name and mailing address. **If we print your recipe, you'll receive a free one-year subscription to *Cook's Country*.**

EASY MINCEMEAT FRUITCAKE

Makes 2 cakes

"Fruitcake has a bad reputation for being loaded with neon red and green candied fruit. This recipe that my mom always made uses jarred mincemeat and dried fruits." —Janice Campbell, Reston, Va.

Mincemeat can be found in the baking section of most supermarkets. This recipe was tested using one 29-ounce jar of Robertson's Mincemeat Classic. The test kitchen's preferred loaf pan, the Williams-Sonoma Goldtouch Nonstick Loaf Pan, measures 8½ by 4½ inches; if you use 9 by 5-inch loaf pans, start checking for doneness 5 minutes earlier than advised in the recipe. Shred the apple on the large holes of a box grater.

- **1 cup golden raisins**
- **1 cup dried cranberries**
- **1 Granny Smith apple, peeled, shredded, and squeezed dry**
- **6 tablespoons brandy, plus extra for brushing**
- **⅓ cup finely chopped crystallized ginger**
- **1 teaspoon grated orange zest**
- **1 (29-ounce) jar prepared mincemeat (2½ cups)**
- **1 (14-ounce) can sweetened condensed milk**
- **6 tablespoons vegetable oil**
- **2 large eggs, lightly beaten**
- **2¾ cups (13¾ ounces) all-purpose flour**
- **1 teaspoon baking soda**
- **½ teaspoon salt**
- **1 tablespoon confectioners' sugar**

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 300 degrees. Grease and flour two 8½ by 4½ inch nonstick loaf pans. Combine raisins, cranberries, apple, brandy, ginger, and orange zest in large bowl. Let sit for 15 minutes.

2. Stir mincemeat, condensed milk, oil, and eggs into fruit mixture until thoroughly combined. Whisk flour, baking soda, and salt together in separate bowl. Stir flour mixture into fruit mixture until thoroughly combined (batter will be very thick).

3. Divide batter between prepared pans, smoothing tops with spatula. Bake until toothpick inserted in center comes out clean, 1¼ hours to 1 hour 25 minutes, switching and rotating pans halfway through baking. Let cakes cool in pans on wire rack for 15 minutes. Invert cakes onto rack and let cool completely.

4. Brush tops and sides of cakes with extra brandy. Wrap cakes tightly in aluminum foil and store at room temperature for at least 24 hours or up to 3 days. To serve, dust with confectioners' sugar and slice with serrated knife.

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RC = Recipe Card

FIND THE ROOSTER!

A tiny version of this rooster has been hidden in the pages of this issue. Write to us with its location and we'll enter you in a random drawing. The first correct entry drawn will win our winning inexpensive Dutch oven, and each of the next five will receive a free one-year subscription to *Cook's Country*. To enter, visit **CooksCountry.com/rooster** by January 31, 2017 or write to Rooster Drawing, *Cook's Country*, P.O. Box 470739, Brookline, MA 02447. Include your name and address. Jake Davis of Scappoose, Oregon, found the rooster in the August/September 2017 issue on page 6 and won our favorite dry measuring cups.

WEB EXTRAS

*Free for 4 months online at **CooksCountry.com***

Cantaloupe and Blue Cheese Salad
Devils on Horseback
Easy Almond Pound Cake
Easy Ginger Pound Cake
Easy Orange Pound Cake
Tasting Ground Ginger
Testing Cream Whippers
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THE GREAT AMER CAN CAKE

Chocolate-Pecan Torte

Don't let the simplicity of this cake fool you—it's pure decadence, with a hefty portion of ground pecans and rum added to a rich chocolate torte.

TO MAKE THIS CAKE, YOU WILL NEED:

- **8 ounces bittersweet chocolate, chopped**
- **6 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into 3 pieces**
- **1½ cups pecan halves, plus about 30 halves for decorating**
- **1 cup (5 ounces) all-purpose flour**
- **¾ teaspoon ground cinnamon**
- **½ teaspoon salt**
- **4 large eggs, separated**
- **1 cup packed (7 ounces) light brown sugar**
- **2 teaspoons vanilla extract**
- **⅓ cup spiced rum**
- **1½ cups Chocolate Glaze (recipe follows)**

FOR THE CAKE: Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 300 degrees. Grease 9-inch springform pan and line bottom with parchment paper. Microwave chocolate and butter in bowl at 50 percent power, stirring occasionally, until melted, 1 to 2 minutes, let cool slightly. Process 1½ cups pecans, flour, cinnamon, and salt in food processor until finely ground, about 30 seconds.

Using stand mixer fitted with whisk attachment, whip egg whites on medium-low speed until foamy, about 1 minute. Increase speed to medium-high and whip whites to soft, billowy mounds, about 1 minute. Gradually add ¼ cup sugar and whip until glossy, soft peaks form, 1 to 2 minutes.

Whisk egg yolks, vanilla, and remaining ¾ cup sugar in large bowl until pale and thick, about 30 seconds. Slowly whisk in chocolate mixture until combined. Slowly whisk in rum until combined. Using whisk, fold in one-third of whipped whites. Using rubber spatula, gently fold in half of pecan mixture. Repeat with half of remaining whites and remaining pecan mixture, finishing with remaining whites. Transfer batter to prepared pan and bake until toothpick inserted in center comes out clean, 45 to 50 minutes, rotating pan halfway through baking. Let cake cool completely in pan on wire rack.

TO ASSEMBLE: Remove sides and bottom of springform pan. Invert cake onto wire rack set over rimmed baking sheet; discard parchment. Pour glaze evenly over top and sides of cake. Refrigerate until set, about 30 minutes. Transfer cake to plate or pedestal and arrange pecan halves along bottom edge. Serve.

CHOCOLATE GLAZE

Makes 1½ cups

Plan to use the glaze immediately after making it.

- **8 ounces bittersweet chocolate, chopped**
- **¾ cup heavy cream**
- **2 tablespoons corn syrup**
- **Pinch salt**

Place chocolate in medium bowl. Heat cream in small saucepan over medium-high heat until just starting to simmer. Pour over chocolate and let sit for 5 minutes. Gently whisk mixture, starting in center and working outward, until melted and smooth. Gently stir in corn syrup and salt until combined. Use immediately.

30 MINUTE SUPPER

ROASTED SALMON AND BROCCOLI RABE WITH PISTACHIO GREMOLATA

30 MINUTE SUPPER

STIR-FRIED STEAK WITH SHIITAKE MUSHROOMS AND CABBAGE

30 MINUTE SUPPER

CUMIN-CRUSTED CHICKEN THIGHS WITH CAULIFLOWER "COUSCOUS"

30 MINUTE SUPPER

STEAK WITH LEMON-PARSLEY POTATO WEDGES AND BLUE-CHEESE SAUCE

STIR-FRIED STEAK WITH SHIITAKE MUSHROOMS AND CABBAGE Serves 4

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: We stir-fry the mushrooms and cabbage together over high heat to help streamline the cooking process.

- **12 ounces flank steak, trimmed, cut lengthwise with grain into thirds, then sliced crosswise ⅛ inch thick**
- **¼ cup oyster sauce**
- **3 tablespoons vegetable oil**
- **12 ounces shiitake mushrooms, stemmed and sliced thin**
- **8 cups thinly sliced napa cabbage**
- **4 garlic cloves, minced**
- **1 tablespoon grated fresh ginger**
- **3 scallions, sliced thin**
- **1 tablespoon packed light brown sugar**
- **1 teaspoon cornstarch, dissolved in 1 tablespoon water**

1. Combine steak and 1 tablespoon oyster sauce in bowl. Heat 1½ teaspoons oil in 12-inch nonstick skillet over high heat until just smoking. Add half of steak in single layer and cook, without stirring it, for 1 minute. Stir and continue to cook until meat is no longer pink, about 30 seconds longer; transfer to clean bowl. Repeat with 1½ teaspoons oil and remaining steak.

2. Heat remaining 2 tablespoons oil in now-empty skillet over high heat until just smoking. Add mushrooms and cabbage and cook, stirring occasionally, until browned and cabbage is wilted, about 8 minutes.

3. Stir garlic, ginger, half of scallions, and steak into mushroom-cabbage mixture and cook until fragrant, about 1 minute. Stir in sugar, cornstarch mixture, and remaining 3 tablespoons oyster sauce and cook until thickened, about 30 seconds. Serve, sprinkled with remaining scallions.

ROASTED SALMON AND BROCCOLI RABE WITH PISTACHIO GREMOLATA Serves 4

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: Using only one pan and the oven streamlines this dish and makes it an ideal (and healthy) weeknight dinner.

- **¼ cup shelled pistachios, toasted and chopped fine**
- **2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley**
- **1 teaspoon grated lemon zest**
- **2 garlic cloves, minced**
- **1 pound broccoli rabe, trimmed and cut into 1½-inch lengths**
- **2 tablespoons plus 2 teaspoons extra-virgin olive oil**
- **Salt and pepper**
- **Pinch red pepper flakes**
- **4 (6- to 8-ounce) center-cut skinless salmon fillets, 1 to 1½ inches thick**

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 450 degrees. Combine pistachios, parsley, lemon zest, and half of garlic in small bowl; set gremolata aside.

2. Toss broccoli rabe, 2 tablespoons oil, ¼ teaspoon salt, ¼ teaspoon pepper, pepper flakes, and remaining garlic together in bowl. Arrange on half of rimmed baking sheet. Pat salmon dry with paper towels, then rub all over with remaining 2 teaspoons oil and season with salt and pepper. Arrange salmon on empty half of sheet, skinned side down.

3. Roast until centers of fillets register 125 degrees (for medium-rare) and broccoli rabe is tender, about 10 minutes. Serve, sprinkled with gremolata.

TEST KITCHEN NOTE: Broccoli rabe is sometimes called rapini.

STEAK WITH LEMON-PARSLEY POTATO WEDGES AND BLUE-CHEESE SAUCE Serves 4

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: Microwaving blue cheese and cream makes an incredibly easy and delicious sauce.

- **2 pounds russet potatoes, unpeeled, halved lengthwise and cut into 1-inch-thick wedges**
- **3 tablespoons vegetable oil**
- **Salt and pepper**
- **3 tablespoons minced fresh parsley**
- **1 tablespoon grated lemon zest**
- **2 (1-pound) boneless strip steaks, about 1 inch thick, trimmed and halved crosswise**
- **4 ounces blue cheese, crumbled (1 cup)**
- **½ cup heavy cream**

1. Adjust oven rack to upper-middle position and heat oven to 475 degrees. Toss potatoes with 2 tablespoons oil, 1½ teaspoons salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper on rimmed baking sheet and arrange cut sides down in single layer. Roast until spotty brown and tender, about 25 minutes. Sprinkle with 2 tablespoons parsley and lemon zest.

2. Meanwhile, pat steaks dry with paper towels and season with salt and pepper. Heat remaining 1 tablespoon oil in 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium-high heat until just smoking. Add steaks and cook until well browned and meat registers 125 degrees (for medium-rare), 3 to 5 minutes per side. Let rest on wire rack.

3. Combine blue cheese and cream in bowl and microwave until blue cheese is melted and smooth, about 3 minutes. Slice steaks, sprinkle with remaining 1 tablespoon parsley, and serve with potatoes and blue cheese sauce.

CUMIN-CRUSTED CHICKEN THIGHS WITH CAULIFLOWER "COUSCOUS" Serves 4

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: Sprinkling cumin over the chicken after browning and before roasting ensures pleasantly toasted seeds without any bitter burnt bite.

- **8 (5- to 7-ounce) bone-in chicken thighs**
- **Salt and pepper**
- **1 tablespoon vegetable oil**
- **4 teaspoons cumin seeds**
- **1 head cauliflower (2 pounds), cored and cut into ½-inch pieces**
- **1 teaspoon paprika**
- **½ cup chopped fresh mint, plus 2 tablespoons torn mint leaves**
- **1½ teaspoons grated lime zest, plus lime wedges for serving**

1. Adjust oven rack to upper-middle position and heat oven to 375 degrees. Pat chicken dry with paper towels; season with salt and pepper. Heat oil in 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium-high heat until just smoking. Add chicken, skin side down, and cook until well browned, about 7 minutes. Transfer chicken, skin side up, to rimmed baking sheet (do not wipe out skillet) and sprinkle 2 teaspoons cumin seeds over top. Roast until chicken registers 175 degrees, about 15 minutes.

2. Meanwhile, working in 2 batches, pulse cauliflower in food processor to ¼- to ⅛-inch pieces, about 6 pulses. Heat fat remaining in skillet over medium-high heat until shimmering. Add cauliflower, paprika, ¾ teaspoon salt, ¾ teaspoon pepper, and remaining 2 teaspoons cumin seeds and cook until just tender, about 7 minutes. Off heat, stir in chopped mint and lime zest.

3. Serve chicken with cauliflower "couscous" and lime wedges, sprinkling torn mint leaves over top.

30-MINUTE SUPPER

ITALIAN SAUSAGE WITH LENTILS AND KALE

30-MINUTE SUPPER

FARFALLE WITH CRISPY PROSCIUTTO AND PEAS

30-MINUTE SUPPER

PEPPER AND ONION FRITTATA
WITH ARUGULA SALAD

30-MINUTE SUPPER

APRICOT-GLAZED CHICKEN WITH
CHICKPEAS, CHORIZO, AND SPINACH

FARFALLE WITH CRISPY PROSCIUTTO AND PEAS Serves 4

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: Crisping the prosciutto not only develops its flavor but also creates a pleasing textural contrast in this dish.

- 12 ounces farfalle
- Salt and pepper
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, plus extra for drizzling
- 6 ounces thinly sliced prosciutto, cut into ½-inch pieces
- 1 onion, chopped
- ¼ teaspoon red pepper flakes
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 (28-ounce) can whole peeled tomatoes, drained and crushed by hand
- 1½ cups frozen peas
- 2 ounces Parmesan cheese, grated (1 cup)

1. Bring 4 quarts water to boil in large pot. Add pasta and 1 tablespoon salt and cook, stirring often, until al dente. Reserve ½ cup cooking water, then drain pasta and return it to pot.

2. Meanwhile, heat oil in 12-inch skillet over medium heat until shimmering. Add prosciutto and cook until crispy, about 10 minutes. Using slotted spoon, transfer prosciutto to paper towel–lined plate. Return skillet to medium heat; to fat left in skillet, add onion, pepper flakes, ⅛ teaspoon salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper. Cook until onion is softened, about 5 minutes. Add garlic and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Add tomatoes and cook, stirring occasionally, until sauce is thickened, about 10 minutes.

3. Add peas, ¾ cup Parmesan, sauce, and ¼ cup reserved cooking water to pasta and toss to combine. Adjust consistency with remaining reserved cooking water as needed. Serve, sprinkled with prosciutto and remaining ¼ cup Parmesan and drizzled with extra oil.

TEST KITCHEN NOTE: Brighten up this dish with the addition of fresh basil.

ITALIAN SAUSAGE WITH LENTILS AND KALE Serves 4

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: Cooking sausages on top of the lentil mixture infuses this one-skillet meal with rich, meaty flavor.

- 2 teaspoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1½ pounds sweet Italian sausage
- 2 shallots, peeled, halved, and sliced thin
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 10 ounces kale, stemmed and chopped
- ¾ cup chicken broth
- Salt and pepper
- 1 (15-ounce) can lentils, rinsed
- 3 tablespoons plain yogurt
- 2 tablespoons whole-grain mustard
- 1 tablespoon water

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 375 degrees. Heat oil in 12-inch skillet over medium-high heat until just smoking. Add sausage and cook until browned all over, about 5 minutes; transfer to plate.

2. Reduce heat to medium, add shallots and garlic to now-empty skillet, and cook until vegetables start to brown, about 3 minutes. Add kale, broth, ¼ teaspoon salt, and ¼ teaspoon pepper; cover and cook until wilted, about 5 minutes.

3. Stir in lentils. Arrange browned sausage on top of lentil mixture and transfer skillet to oven. Cook, uncovered, until sausage registers 160 degrees, about 12 minutes. Whisk yogurt, mustard, and water together in bowl; drizzle over top. Serve.

TEST KITCHEN NOTE: For a spicier kick, use hot Italian sausage. We prefer curly kale for this recipe, but other varieties will work.

APRICOT-GLAZED CHICKEN WITH CHICKPEAS, CHORIZO, AND SPINACH Serves 4

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: Lemon zest and the mild spice of chorizo balance the sweetness of the apricot preserves.

- ¼ cup apricot preserves
- 2 teaspoons grated lemon zest
- Salt and pepper
- 4 (10- to 12-ounce) bone-in split chicken breasts, trimmed and halved crosswise
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- 1 (15-ounce) can chickpeas, rinsed
- 6 ounces Spanish-style chorizo sausage, cut into ½-inch chunks
- 1 onion, chopped
- 1½ teaspoons smoked paprika
- 8 ounces (8 cups) baby spinach

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 450 degrees. Combine preserves, lemon zest, ⅛ teaspoon salt, and ⅛ teaspoon pepper in bowl; set aside. Pat chicken dry with paper towels and season with salt and pepper.

2. Heat oil in 12-inch ovensafe skillet over medium-high heat until just smoking. Cook chicken, skin side down, until lightly browned, about 4 minutes. Transfer to plate, skin side up. Off heat, combine chickpeas, chorizo, onion, paprika, ⅛ teaspoon salt, and ⅛ teaspoon pepper in now-empty skillet.

3. Return chicken to skillet, skin side up, and brush apricot mixture over chicken. Bake until chicken registers 160 degrees, about 24 minutes. Transfer chicken to carving board. Return skillet to medium-high heat, add spinach, and cook until wilted, about 2 minutes. Serve.

PEPPER AND ONION FRITTATA WITH ARUGULA SALAD Serves 4

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: Adding a salad to this breakfast staple makes a well-rounded meal at any time, day or night.

- 12 large eggs
- 3 tablespoons half-and-half
- Salt and pepper
- 3½ tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 red bell peppers, stemmed, seeded, and sliced thin
- 1 small onion, sliced thin
- 2 ounces (2 cups) baby arugula
- ¼ cup pitted kalamata olives, halved
- 2 teaspoons lemon juice
- 2 ounces goat cheese, crumbled (½ cup)

1. Adjust oven rack to upper-middle position and heat oven to 375 degrees. Whisk eggs, half-and-half, ½ teaspoon salt, and ¼ teaspoon pepper in large bowl until well combined.

2. Heat 1½ tablespoons oil in 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium-high heat until shimmering. Add bell peppers and onion and cook until spotty brown, about 8 minutes. Reduce heat to medium-low and stir in egg mixture. Cook, using spatula to scrape bottom of skillet, until large curds form but eggs are still very wet, about 2 minutes. Smooth egg mixture into even layer. Transfer skillet to oven and bake until surface is golden brown, 8 to 10 minutes. Slide frittata onto serving platter.

3. Toss arugula, olives, lemon juice, and remaining 2 tablespoons oil together in bowl. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Pile salad on top of frittata, sprinkle with goat cheese, and serve.

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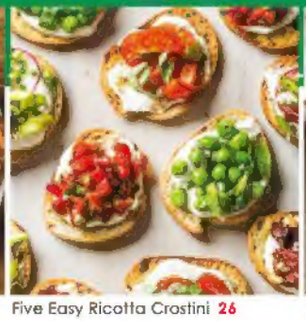
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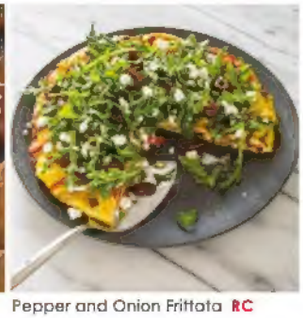
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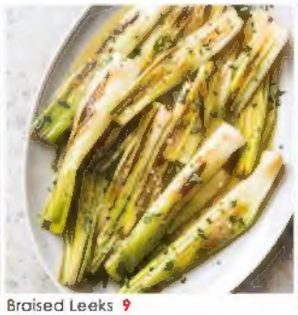
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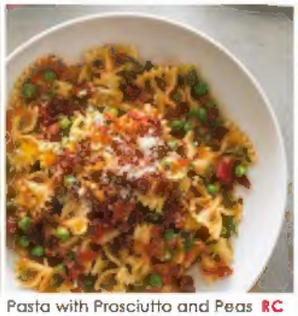
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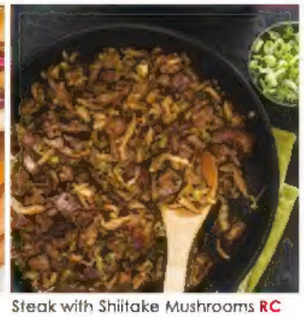
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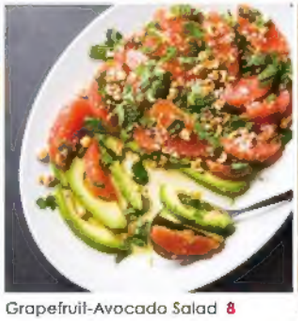
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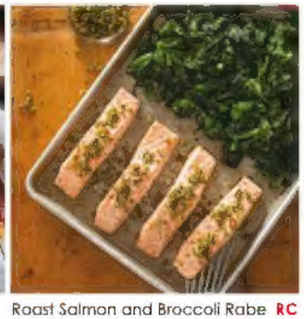
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